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MANAGEMENT  
COUNCIL

**Report of the American Samoa Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan  
American Samoa Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee Meeting**

Monday, June 30, 2025

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Naumati Conference Room, Tradewinds Hotel  
Ottoville, American Samoa

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

Will Sword, Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council) Chair and Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee (REAC) Chair, opened the meeting at 9:11 a.m. REAC members in attendance included: Director of EPA, Ryan Tuato'o (ASPA), Nate Ilaoa (Advisory Panel Vice Chair, LeVasa Pathways), LCDR Matt Guanci, Atuatasi Lelei Peau (NMSAS), Natasha Bartley (DMWR Acting Director), Martina Sagapolu (Asst Director for NOAA OLE PID), Brooke Gurr (USDA NRCS) Sabrina Mahuka (Finafinau, Resilience Office), DPW Tilei

Others in attendance included: Felix Penalosa and Joshua DeMello, Council Staff; Val Brown, William Russell USCG, Domingo Ochavillo (DMWR), Alex Min (PIFG), Clay Tam (PIFG), Gina Faiga (CZM/DOC), Trevor Kaituu (CRAG), Selaina Tuimavave (DMWR), Amy Uhrin (NOA MDMAP), Carlie Herring (NOAA MDMAP), Donna Schroeder (BOEM), Ernie Tapanes (Impossible Metals IM), Grace Felise (ASDOC), Mark Manuel (NOAA MDMAP), Jozee Killoren (DAWSON), Natalie Nguyen (BOEM), Neco Sumait (BOEM), Peter Jantzen (IM), and Archie Soliai.

The Governor offered opening remarks, noting his attendance was to learn about REAC and current issues in the territory.

**2. About the AS Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee**

Joshua DeMello, Council Staff, provided a background on the REAC, its purpose, and the goals and objectives of the American Samoa Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP). He noted the purpose of the REAC is to collaborate with the different agencies in American Samoa that have management authority that may affect fisheries.

**3. Report of the 2023 REAC Recommendations**

Felix Penalosa, Council Staff, provided a report on the last REAC meeting held June 22, 2023, at the Sadie's by the Sea Conference Room. He provided an update on the status of recommendations from the last REAC meeting.

The Governor asked how binding the recommendations from the REAC are.

The Chair responded that REAC recommendations go to the Council, and the Council then makes requests or recommendations to ASG. He explained that the process provides transparency, allows for feedback, and ensures responses.

The Governor followed up by asking if this was the time for ASG to respond to the recommendations if there is a status.

The Chair confirmed that updates or clarifications could be made at this time.

#### **4. Federal Fishery Monitoring and Management**

##### **a. American Samoa FEP Overview**

Background was provided under agenda item 2.

##### **b. President Trumps Executive Orders**

DeMello provided an update on recent executive orders signed by President Trump aimed at boosting U.S. seafood competitiveness and deregulating fisheries management. These include Executive Order 14276, which directs federal agencies to reduce regulatory burdens, address unfair foreign trade practices, and modernize seafood data systems. The update also covered the reopening of areas previously closed under marine national monument designations to commercial fishing.

##### *Discussion*

A member noted that through managing the American Samoa Fishery page and engaging the public, they heard overwhelming support in Manu'a to open the monument to fishing and to restore the traditional name of Muliava. They added that migratory fish stocks do not remain in one place and that drawing boxes in the ocean is ineffective, comparing it to drawing boxes in the sky while duck hunting.

The Chair added that the longline fleet has asked to open Muliava to about 10 miles. He noted that the South Bank is open 44 miles away, and Muliava is about the same distance. The fleet would like to fish there again.

##### **c. Deep Sea Mining in American Samoa BOEM Presentation and Discussion**

BOEM/Impossible Metals/ASEDC

BOEM staff presented an overview of the federal review process for offshore mineral leasing in American Samoa, including the Request for Information (RFI) submitted by Impossible Metals in April 2025. The process includes environmental and cultural reviews, public comments, and coordination with territorial and federal agencies.

The Governor stated that ASG will host a town hall meeting this week to gather comments from the community and deferred to a member for additional remarks.

A member emphasized the importance of engaging the community and said ASG may request a 30-day extension. She asked whether BOEM would allow audio and video submissions of comments and whether any metrics had been set to determine how those comments would be considered. She also noted that ASG had requested a video presentation to help with the town hall meetings.

The Chair asked about potential activity along the border between American Samoa and the Cook Islands and whether there were any developments given China's involvement in the region.

BOEM staff responded that they were not aware of any current activity in that area.

The Chair followed by asking whether the Cook Islands were using the same process as BOEM and noted that any developments could affect fisheries.

A member asked what BOEM's policy was for considering comments submitted in Samoan. BOEM staff replied that they would investigate translation services and welcome recommendations.

The Chair asked if BOEM had interpreters available. BOEM explained that interpretation was not yet arranged but could be coordinated with ASG.

The Governor offered that ASG would be able to help with translation.

A member raised the concern that impacts on tuna fisheries may overlap and said that the WCPFC had not been engaged by ISA. He stressed that BOEM should consider engaging with WCPFC, noting that a recent commission report highlighted possible impacts to tuna fisheries. He explained that the American Samoa longline fleet fishes within the EEZ and not in other countries' waters, making it important to understand how much tuna is caught in areas that could be affected.

BOEM encouraged these concerns to be submitted in writing or directly by email.

A member added that the biggest concern for American Samoa is the potential impacts to fisheries, which he described as the territory's primary economic driver.

Another member again asked whether BOEM would accept audio and video recordings from the town hall.

BOEM staff replied that they could be accepted and asked if transcription support could be provided. They said BOEM would find a way to incorporate those comments.

The Chair observed that BOEM's presentation would be useful to start discussions at the town hall.

A member suggested that BOEM also provide printed materials in both English and Samoan.

Another member asked whether BOEM planned to engage with the Cook Islands, since they may be the first country to move forward with extraction.

BOEM staff said their office of international affairs was monitoring developments broadly and intended to stay aware of related issues.

The Governor said the issue is new for American Samoa, especially regarding the Cook Islands' agreements with China. He asked what would happen if mining activity near the EEZ boundary caused spillover into American Samoa's waters and whether enforcement measures would exist.

BOEM replied that any prospecting within U.S. waters would require a BOEM license.

The Governor further asked whether there would be enforcement to protect American Samoa's EEZ, particularly regarding tuna if activities occurred at the border.

The Chair remarked that the issue came down to monitoring activity in the water column.

BOEM responded that more information is needed and that future studies should provide greater insight into tuna fisheries in the region.

### **Impossible Metals Presentation and Discussion**

Representatives from Impossible Metals introduced themselves, played a prerecorded video from their CEO, and emphasized that the company is at the very beginning of the process.

The Chair asked if the company had other sites where its technology was being used.

Impossible Metals responded that robotics technology has been used for mapping and environmental benchmarking, not yet for commercial exploration. They explained that their current plan involves five years of environmental benchmarking.

The Chair asked whether there was any commercial production of this technology in the world.

Impossible Metals replied that there was no commercial production yet, although other companies had conducted prototype tests and China had recently received ISA approval for testing.

The Chair asked how this could affect American Samoa economically.

Impossible Metals explained that in the Clarion Clipperton Zone, companies project annual collection of 5,000 to 6,000 tons of nodules, generating around 5 billion dollars per year in revenue over an area of 75 square kilometers.

A member asked if the company's prototype was still experimental.

Impossible Metals responded that their vehicle had been proven at 6,000 meters depth and that further testing was planned with the German government.

Another member described AI-assisted camera tests and sediment plume modeling that suggested their system caused less disturbance than traditional track vehicles.

A member noted that the technology was still unproven at depth and asked whether multiple prototypes were being developed.

Impossible Metals explained that they were progressing step by step, starting with single-unit testing before moving to multiple units. They also described a buoyancy system designed to minimize disturbance by directing plumes upward.

Another member raised questions about sediment rates and mid-water plumes. Impossible Metals explained that nodules are cleaned off during the process and that tests in Florida suggested sediment impacts would be minimized.

A member asked whether removing plentiful metals from the seabed could have ripple effects on the ecosystem. Impossible Metals replied that many studies have been completed but that much more research is needed to understand long-term impacts.

Another member asked whether ISA had endorsed any one technology over another. Impossible Metals responded that UNCLOS requires a high standard of caution and that their technology demonstrated the lowest impact among available options.

The Chair asked what guidelines existed for sediment impacts. Impossible Metals explained that ISA working groups were developing regulations expected to be released soon. The Chair remarked that the fisheries commission will likely have robust discussions on this issue, given the potential impacts to fisheries in the mid-Pacific.

Impossible Metals expressed confidence that their technology will not significantly affect fisheries. A member noted that there are currently no federal quotas or agreements that provide direct economic benefit to American Samoa.

Impossible Metals responded that benefits would come indirectly through taxation, infrastructure, and potential processing opportunities.

Another member emphasized that fisheries are the territory's current industry and must remain intact. Impossible Metals estimated that 6 million tons of nodules per year could generate 6 billion dollars annually in revenue.

A member asked whether educational opportunities could be created in ocean management and robotics to build a local workforce.

Impossible Metals representatives said they were interested in supporting robotics training and involving local students. They recommended that licenses include requirements for training programs to benefit local populations.

The Chair noted that a local high school recently won a robotics competition, highlighting the potential for community engagement.

Council staff provided an update on the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Climate Change and Communities Program. They explained that the program includes a contractor-led review of fisheries regulations to identify outdated provisions, regulatory gaps, and opportunities to better align with climate priorities and territorial needs. Council staff also reported on ongoing community consultations being conducted by the Pacific Islands Fisheries Group, including meetings in American Samoa to gather input from fishermen about climate impacts, equity concerns, and ways to strengthen governance and resilience.

The Chair noted that the community of Manu'a has asked to be included in training programs such as Fatoata, which focus on fishing skills, knot tying, and other traditional techniques. He observed that the lures currently available in Manu'a are of poor quality and that fishers there do not have the skills to make their own, highlighting the importance of these programs for capacity building.

## **5. Roundtable Climate Change Impacts in American Samoa**

The Chair facilitated discussion on climate change in American Samoa with a concentration on the issues facing the islands and its relation to national or local initiatives.

A member recommended that the Council look at climate factors and align them with catch data to understand trends more clearly.

Council staff explained that this information is reported in the annual SAFE reports. They noted that the 2024 report would be published soon but added that it is difficult to establish a definitive correlation between catch data and climate factors.

A member stated that pelagic fisheries are the most impacted, with models showing stocks moving into the eastern Pacific. They added that most local fisheries rely on those stocks, which support both subsistence and cultural practices, underscoring the need for long-term data.

Another member asked if data had been synthesized to capture recent events such as coral bleaching, noting that last year's event was the largest thermal stress ever recorded in American Samoa. They observed that corals are now surviving deeper in the water column, which may be altering ecosystems.

Council staff responded that some fisheries changes may be more related to economic factors rather than environmental ones, pointing out that it is difficult to match landings and CPUE with climate events. They added that looking at coral reef fisheries or gleaning may show more immediate impacts.

The Chair agreed that correlations between climate and fisheries data have been difficult to establish.

A member highlighted a significant decline in palolo harvests over the past few decades. They noted that at the same time there has been an increase in shark predation and suggested that this may or may not be related to cannery dump sites. They stressed the importance of looking at how these factors may be linked.

The Chair observed that palolo harvests have declined in traditional areas near the airport and noted that when fishers go to the B-FADs, the sludge boat is often nearby surrounded by sharks. He remarked that EPA maintains the dump site is in the same location it has always been, but currents may have changed.

A member recounted fishing off Vaitogi where a shark chased a skipjack within a quarter mile of shore. They said that every time they go bottom fishing, sharks take their catch, which has become a concern for recreational fishers.

The Chair added that skipjack tuna are becoming more difficult to find and said that banks are now full of sharks. He questioned whether sharks were being drawn to pinnacles or whether changes in food availability from other fisheries were affecting their distribution.

A member noted that the SSC has reported shark depredation as a Pacific-wide phenomenon.

Another member said that science-based observations from boats and shore are being recorded to help determine what factors are influencing these changes, and that input from the community is being collected as part of this effort.

## **6. American Samoa Fishery and Resource Conservation Issues**

**a. American Samoa Territorial Fishery Management Plan** DMWR  
DMWR reported on the development of a complementary territorial FMP to manage fisheries within 0–3 nautical miles. The plan will complement federal management and include SAFE reporting with ecosystem indicators, community input, and habitat protection measures.

The Chair asked about the status of the giant clam’s issue.

A member responded that with decreased funding, many issues had been put aside, and they had not heard any updates from NOAA.

### **b. American Samoa Shark Depredation**

DMWR provided an update on shark depredation in American Samoa. The agency is working to monitor fishing operations and to assess the role of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) and other hotspots where depredation is occurring. They noted collaboration with ASEPA to evaluate the proximity of the cannery offal dumping site and whether it is influencing shark behavior. Next steps include collecting additional data, engaging stakeholders, and developing possible management actions to reduce shark impacts on fisheries.

**c. Marine Debris Monitoring Survey** NOAA/DAWSON  
NOAA’s Marine Debris Program, with contractor DAWSON, presented a new survey to establish baseline data on marine debris across the territory. The project will monitor types, sources, and distribution of debris to inform future cleanup, prevention, and education activities.

A member reminded NOAA not to overlook the island of Ta'u in the survey.

Another member expressed frustration that many of the monitoring sites were being placed on outlying islands with complex coastlines and questioned whether these sites would be representative.

## **7. Roundtable Agency and Partner Updates**

REAC Members

A member reiterated the importance of opening the Muliava monument to fishing. He stressed that the local longline fleet is in dire straits, explaining that three Samoan families make up the majority of the fleet and that they are operating at a loss. He emphasized that the fleet is highly monitored and that access to fishing grounds is needed to sustain the fishery.

Another member reported that the Tauese Ocean Center is closed for renovations but is expected to reopen in late September. He explained that although it was not an easy decision to close, it was necessary to ensure safety while work is underway. Staff remain available for outreach and engagement programs, including workshops and online resources.

A member highlighted a new interactive tool that compiles data on species and ocean conditions into a website. He thanked contributors for providing data and said the tool now includes information on ocean temperature and will incorporate data from the SAFE reports.

The Chair noted that the new wave buoys have been very useful to fishermen. He added that Rose Atoll remains an important issue, with both Ta'u and Ofu communities calling for it to be reopened for fishing. He said the longline fleet has been asking for access within 10 miles.

Another member reminded everyone of the upcoming town hall meeting later that day and thanked partners for participating in island-wide cleanup efforts.

A member from NOAA OLE stressed that the U.S. fleet is heavily regulated and closely monitored. She said that when vessels are observed in the EEZ, OLE or the Coast Guard are notified. She asked if any suspected foreign vessels or IUU activity be reported, since monitoring and enforcement rely on such information. She added that OLE is also monitoring bycatch issues and coordinating with Customs to track where fish products are going, but that the office is understaffed and down to one officer.

Another member commended the consultative work of the Council and raised concerns about foreign fish entering local markets. He explained that this affects both the longline and alia fleets, displacing opportunities for local fishermen. He also noted that executive orders provide an opportunity to revisit fisheries regulations, including those related to coral critical habitat and giant clams. He cautioned that the territory lacks the capacity to restock these species. He further raised concern that local permitting processes often lack transparency, particularly when land-based activities affect the ocean. He recommended that the REAC consider legal representation, noting that most territorial regulations are outdated and there is limited legal support within ASG.



Another member agreed, emphasizing that the Alia fleet is also impacted by bycatch issues and that stronger collaboration with federal partners is needed. She suggested that legal support would help develop proper language and solutions to strengthen fisheries management.

#### **8. Public Comment**

Chair

There was no public comment

#### **9. Discussion and Recommendations**

The American Samoa Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee made the following recommendations:

*Regarding IRA meetings in American Samoa, the ASREAC:*

- Endorsed the findings of the IRA meetings such as the needs for providing training and safety workshops for fishermen

*Regarding Deep Sea Mining, the ASREAC:*

- Recommended the Council continue to monitor the deep sea mining efforts in American Samoa and provide the fishing community with information and analysis of impacts to fishing and fishery resources as it becomes available.
- Recommended the Council request the deep sea mining companies include educational opportunities to get locals involved in the industry

*Regarding Monuments, the ASREAC:*

- Recommended the Council review its fishing regulations for the Rose Atoll MNM to determine whether it is still suitable for American Samoa residents given the current federal efforts
- Recommended the Council communicate to the Administration the need to change the name from Rose Atoll to Muliava

#### **10. Other Business**

Chair

There was no other business

**Meeting ended at 12:30 PM**