



Report of the American Samoa Archipelago Advisory Panel Meeting

Tuesday, December 2, 2025; 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. (SST); 7 p.m. – 9 p.m. (HST)

Hybrid Meeting via Webex

1. Welcome and Introductions

Gene Pan, American Samoa Advisory Panel (AP) Vice-Chair, opened the meeting at 6:04 p.m. Members in attendance included Joe Hamby, Keith Ah Soon, Nonu Tuisamoa, and Jerome Ierome, and Clay Tam. Dustin Snow, Ray Tulafono, and Louis Solaita were excused.

Others in attendance included Felix Penalosa, Zach Yamada, Asuka Ishizaki, Joshua DeMello, Mark Mitsuyasu, Mark Fitchett, Danika Kleiber, Elora Raymond, Luisa Leo, Brian Peck, Rudy Bartley, Natasha Tuatoo Bartley, Dan Aga, Vera Peck, Liza M Tuatoo, Luisa Leo, Motusa Nua, and Andra Samoa.

2. Review of the Last AP Recommendation and Meeting

Felix Penalosa, Council staff, provided a review of the last AP recommendations from the meeting held on September 2, 2025.

3. Council Fisheries Issues

A. Recommendations on Commercial Fishing in the Pacific Islands Heritage MNM

Joshua DeMello, Council staff, provided an overview on the options for restoring commercial fishing in the Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument. On April 17, 2025, President Trump issued Proclamation 10918 that repeal all burdensome regulations that restrict commercial fishing. Following the action, the action was challenged where the action was overturned. This action is to authorize commercial fishing within the US EEZ between 50-200 nm offshore Wake and Jarvis Island and Johnston Atoll. Jarvis and Wake have fishing regulations that authorize non-commercial fishing, and there were previous fishery regulations in place that include permit and reporting, catch limits, and gear restrictions. However there has not been permit request since 2019. Options for consideration include no action, restore sustainable commercial fishing, or restore sustainable commercial fishing with enhanced regulations.

An AP member asked about the difference between Options 1 and 2 and what the Council's management plan for the area would be.

Council staff said if the Council chooses no action, then this could change the dynamic of the fishery and the cannery could feel the repercussions and option 2 would allow the longliners to fish back in the area.

An AP member said they need those closed areas and whether or not the AP want to consider enhanced management, it is a matter for the scientist to make the recommendations based on best available science. He said that the closed areas will enhance US flagged boats, increase their ability to supply tuna to the AS cannery.

An AP member asked whether the term “dormant” referred only to U.S. vessels, and further questioned whether Chinese boats also fish in the area or if the analysis covers only the U.S. fleet.

Council staff clarified that the area is within the U.S. EEZ, and only U.S.-flagged vessels can legally fish there. If foreign vessels enter, the U.S. Coast Guard can enforce violations. There was a past case where two foreign boats were caught in the PRI and the fines helped fund several Council projects.

An AP member asked if there was a report available on the fines.

Council staff said that there is a report and will provide it to the AP.

B. Commercial Fishing in the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument

Joshua DeMello, Council Staff, provided an overview of the federal process driving the current discussion on Rose Atoll, noting that recent presidential directives require a review of national monument commercial fishing prohibitions to determine whether they burden U.S. fisheries. On April 17, 2025, President Trump issued Executive Order 14276, “Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness,” which directed the Secretaries of Commerce and the Interior to review existing restrictions on commercial fishing in marine national monuments and other federally protected marine areas. The order called for recommendations to promote sustainable U.S. seafood production while maintaining conservation objectives. In response, at its 204th Meeting in September 2025, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council endorsed a letter to the Secretary of Commerce providing an analysis and recommendations in accordance with Section 4(h) of EO 14276. The Council also directed staff to initiate an analysis of options to remove commercial fishing prohibitions and evaluate potential impacts to resources in the remaining marine national monuments should the Administration remove the fishing prohibitions. In order to prepare for a potential decision on commercial fishing in the marine national monuments, the Council, at its 205th meeting, may recommend revising fishing regulations in the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument (MNM), Papahānaumokuākea MNM, and Mariana Trench MNM in order to expedite the process. The Council will review options that may include 1) No Action - Do not remove commercial fishing prohibitions; 2) Restore commercial fishing by removing existing prohibitions; or 3) Revising existing fisheries management measures to restore commercial fishing and include new or additional measures. Council staff asked the AP to consider what management tools or limitations the community would want if commercial fishing were ever restored, including which gears or fisheries should be allowed and what reporting, permitting, or area-based protections may be necessary.

An AP member said the Council should limit opening to 0–20 miles instead of 0–50 miles and asked whether there is data showing how much fishing occurs around Muliava. There are no known boats fishing there, and they said most of the fish in local markets now come from Asian countries. If Rose Atoll were opened, existing management tools would be sufficient to manage the fishery.

An AP member said that earlier support for a 0–50-mile boundary mainly came from older traditional fishermen and lacked data support. The member said the AP and Council still need to decide whether the limit should be 0–20 or 0–50 miles, and must understand how it

would be managed. They emphasized that both bodies need to return to the communities in Manu'a, Aunu'u, and Tutuila before making a final recommendation.

An AP member said Rose Atoll is important but emphasized that they depend on what the community says. The community fishes every day, sees the environmental impacts, and the AP has a responsibility to reflect their views.

Council staff explained that the issue will not move forward unless directed by the president. The Council is being proactive because the Secretary of Commerce was instructed to review the monument, but ultimately it is up to the President, and the Council will respond accordingly. The public comment period has been extended, and the Council will be prepared to take action. Staff noted they were in Manu'a last month speaking with the community and will receive a report from the contractor summarizing that outreach.

An AP member said they were in Manu'a during the workshop and noted there was not much feedback on Rose Atoll. The strongest comments focused on the monument's name, noting that Samoans call it Nuu o Manu or Muliava and view it as a sacred place where kings once fished. The member asked when tuna migrate to Rose Atoll, whether the area would only be opened for tuna, and if it would need to be seasonal. They also asked what tuna feed on and where that information is documented. The member raised concerns about enforcement, stating that Chinese vessels may enter the area and that no one is stopping them. They said the AP will eventually need to make a recommendation.

Council staff said the Council have been asking its advisors to look into, because they do not have information on weather patterns, fish spawning, or tuna behavior around Rose Atoll. They asked who would enforce the area and pointed out that enforcement is supposed to be the U.S. Coast Guard, but the USCG are not always present. Longline vessels have VMS tracking, and areas like the PRIA appear as closed zones, but Rose shows no activity, meaning vessels could still enter without being caught. They added that none of this will move forward unless the federal government takes action.

An AP member said the area is desirable for local longliners targeting albacore, and that purse seiners do not fish there because they operate farther north. They suggested asking the local longline fleet for their recommendations and how far out they would want access.

An AP member asked for the number of local longline vessels that participated last year.

Another AP member the Council has all the data and information, and the AP needs that detail to develop informed recommendations and understand the regulatory implications.

Council staff said they met with the Tautai Longline Association and noted that even at the WCPFC meeting, industry emphasized that they fish only within the U.S. EEZ. They explained that the longline fishery is not like others that operate on the high seas. The fleet has been operating strictly within the U.S. EEZ, and access is an issue. Having more space to fish in their own EEZ is important for their viability. They said the American Samoa longline fleet is small and constrained, and that going farther south would mean absorbing high additional costs. They added that peak season is May to October, while the first quarter is usually the off-season.

An AP member said the longline fleet primarily targets albacore and asked whether access could be limited to the American Samoa fleet instead of all U.S. vessels. They also asked how many U.S.-flagged vessels there are.

Council staff responded that the AP could recommend creating a permit specific to American Samoa.

A member of the public said the American Samoa longline and purse seine fleets are “messy” fisheries with a lot of bycatch. They explained that the most recent available data for the American Samoa longline fleet is from 2023, when the fleet caught about 47,000 albacore and roughly 21,000 of the more desirable non-albacore species.

4. Council IRA Project Discussions

A. Scenario Planning

Council staff provided an update on the Scenario Planning Project for the American Samoa longline fishery. They explained that the contractors met with a wide range of local stakeholders to better understand current challenges in the fleet. Stakeholders consistently raised concerns about low albacore prices, uncertainty in cannery purchasing, high operational costs, unreliable bait supply, and ongoing difficulties securing qualified crew, particularly U.S. masters. They also highlighted infrastructure limitations, including dock space, cold storage, and repair capacity. Council staff said these concerns are being incorporated into the development of future scenarios to help identify proactive strategies to support the longline fleet. Additional input will be gathered as the scenario planning work continues into the next phase of the project.

An AP member asked whether Council staff were planning to come to American Samoa in March.

Council staff responded that yes, they were planning to return for a workshop.

B. Regulatory Review

Joshua DeMello, Council Staff, reported that the purpose of this project is to review the FEPs, federal regulations, state/territory regulations, and executive orders or other guidance to determine potential gaps or misalignments, eliminate redundant or unnecessary regulations, and recommend ways to make the FEPs more flexible/adaptable for efficient management in the future.

At the upcoming Council meeting, the contractor team will present an initial analytical report reviewing the landscape of the current FEPs and regulations, identify some gap areas, outline some possible future scenarios that could cause problems in the current system (e.g., climate events shifting stocks to new areas), and prioritize issues uncovered. The team will solicit feedback from the Council to look into additional regulatory areas to include in our review.

Council staff explained that in 2026, the contractor team will conduct two rounds of visits in each jurisdiction to meet with local agencies and communities and gather additional input on

issues related to both local and federal regulations. The team will visit Guam and the CNMI before the March Council meeting, then travel to Hawai'i and American Samoa in late spring or early summer, around June. A second round of meetings will take place between September and November.

The Council would appreciate the AP providing any thoughts you have on regulatory issues, either now or at the meetings in each jurisdiction. Also noted that the Council will also be looking for input on how to improve the Council's community engagement to support decision making on fishery policies

C. Protected Species

Asuka Ishizaki, Council staff, provided an update on the IRA Protected Species Project. The purpose of the workshop was to improve our understanding of how the ecosystem impacts trends and distribution of protected species in the context of the longline fisheries, with a goal of exploring alternative strategies for future management. The workshop was postponed due to the government shutdown prohibiting participation from our NOAA partners, and we felt federal employee participation was important. The workshop has been rescheduled to the first week in February 2026, barring another government shutdown at the end of January.

D. Community Consultation/Vocation Training

Alex Min, PIFG, provided a short presentation on the IRA community engagement and capacity-building work conducted throughout 2025. The project focuses on recording community observations about climate-change impacts and identifying needs for climate-resilient fisheries, as well as implementing a pilot fishery training program that was completed in September.

PIFG staff reviewed regional feedback heard during the IRA meetings, including changing ocean conditions, more severe storms, shifting seasonal patterns, difficulties with bait replacement in outer islands, increased shark depredation, and rising shark aggressiveness across several locations. The second round of IRA meetings will move from documenting issues to working with communities to identify practical solutions. Examples from Manu'a included challenges with boat ramps and fishing infrastructure. PIFG staff also shared updates from the vocational training program participants and described the shark depredation research project underway across the region, which documents traditional knowledge, fisher experiences, and mitigation practices. A final output will be published in March 2026.

An AP member asked whether fishermen are allowed to shoot sharks.

PIFG staff said they were not sure about the regulations, noting that the rules can be confusing in American Samoa because of differences between territorial and federal laws.

Keith Ah Soon, who participated in the vocational program said the program was a great opportunity, especially for someone from Manu'a to learn about commercial fishing. There are about ten alia boats in Manu'a, and the training helped realize how little data is captured about what is actually being caught. The program was an important opportunity for younger generations and for supporting the local economy. Fishing is their main source of income, and they expressed concern about what may change in the future as new opportunities emerge.

Learning new skills and understanding how to benefit from them is extremely valuable and that they hope the program continues to help the community.

An AP member asked if welding was included in the training.

The participant responded that they did not learn welding but hoped to in the future.

5. MSRA Review Update

Mark Fitchett, Council staff, provided an overview of the updated 2025–2029 MSRA Research Priorities, explaining that the Council and SSC are required to set multi-year research priorities to guide NMFS planning and budgeting. The new priorities were developed through a workshop with PIFSC and reviewed by APs, plan teams, and the Council before being finalized. The priorities are organized around the Council’s program themes, including climate adaptation, fishery competitiveness, emerging technologies, community resilience, and fishery development. Key research needs highlighted for the region include improving stock assessments and life-history data, evaluating the effects of large marine protected areas, reducing longline depredation, enhancing island fisheries data collection, addressing protected-species interactions, and strengthening socioeconomic and cultural research to support ecosystem-based management.

An AP member asked whether there is a list of project priorities from the last ten years that have been completed.

Council staff replied that they compiled a list last year summarizing the completed priorities from the past five years.

An AP member asked if the research priorities could include identifying areas in American Samoa that are viable for aquaculture and community-based projects.

Council staff responded that it could be considered, but the type of research and the Council’s role would need to be clarified, and they would need to check with additional staff.

Council staff explained that aquaculture related to MUS would fall under federal species, while the items being asked about—such as seagrass and nearshore fish—are generally not covered under federal waters.

An AP member said they are interested in opportunities for limu, mussels, and similar community-based aquaculture projects and would like to see those types of efforts included.

Council staff said that there are available aquaculture projects included in the Sustainable Fisheries Fund (SFF) and will provide that information to the AP.

6. American Samoa Territorial Fishery Management Plan

Council staff provided an update on the American Samoa Bottomfish Fishery Management Plan, noting it was previously discussed with DMWR in October. The plan manages bottomfish within 0–3 miles and complements the federal FMP. Development included earlier meetings in Tutuila and Manu’a, scientific input, and 2025 community outreach.

Staff said major shifts in the fishery over the past decade, including impacts from the 2009 tsunami, subsidy-supported recoveries, a COVID-related decline in 2021, and increased activity in 2023 as fishers purchased new boats with federal funds. Key challenges include limited biological information, high operating costs, and competition from imported fish and non-target longline catch. Goals include improving stock assessments, updating creel methods, expanding habitat research, and addressing infrastructure needs—especially ice, fuel, and dock access in Manu‘a. Management options under consideration include mandatory reporting, dealer licensing, vessel registration, and size limits, with next steps to finalize the BMUS list and clarify roles and enforcement.

Council staff reported that AP members supported reinstating incentive-based reporting, noting that stipends or ice helped improve data submission. They suggested a simple trip-notification system to help DMWR plan sampling without placing extra burden on fishers. Members raised concerns about competition from cheap imported and longline bycatch fish.

They identified biological data gaps, requesting more life-history information for size limits and outreach; DMWR noted only three species currently have full data. Members supported fisher participation in NOAA’s life-history sampling, stressing that stipends are needed. They also asked about deep-bottom habitat monitoring, and DMWR clarified their dives are shallow and deeper habitats require NOAA vessels. DMWR reported 4–5 active bottomfish vessels in Tutuila and 3 in Manu‘a.

7. Update on Deep Sea Mining BOEM Visit

An AP member reported meeting with Mike McDonald, Tony Langkilde, and four DOI representatives at the Port Administration Conference Room. The BOEM group did not provide formal presentations or handouts; they were there to hear local concerns. The AP member told them that the cannery is the backbone of the American Samoa economy and that nearly every government agency is tied to it. They explained that the territory lost about 10,000 people after 2009—almost 20 percent of the population—and described the economic weight carried by the remaining 56,000 residents. They provided rough estimates that the cannery contributes around \$100 million annually, accounting for shipping, utilities, and household spending, and noted that approximately \$29 million is transferred to Samoa each year, excluding regular shipments of goods and food.

They expressed concern that deep-sea mining (DSM) has been studied for ten years without moving forward and said federal agencies need to understand how much the territory depends on the tuna industry before considering DSM. They questioned how safe DSM would be for the ecosystem and tuna stocks and who would enforce any regulations, pointing out that American Samoa has virtually no Coast Guard presence and typically relies on New Zealand for response. They stressed that if the federal government cannot guarantee environmental safety or enforcement, then DSM should not proceed.

The AP member also emphasized that federal reliance on online public comments is problematic because not everyone in American Samoa can or will submit comments online. They said it is unrealistic to expect widespread electronic participation and urged DOI to recognize this barrier. They concluded that the visitors were there to listen and reiterated that if DSM cannot be proven safe for the environment and the tuna fishery, it should not move forward.

8. Advisory Panel Strategic Planning for 2025

Council staff provided a brief update on the American Samoa Advisory Panel's strategic plan activities. Staff reported that work is still ongoing for the Video PSA Project and that the contractor is expected to deliver updated drafts within the next two to three weeks. They explained that progress on the education one-pager is temporarily on hold because it must undergo review by the Executive Director due to the inclusion of the Council logo. Once approved, translations will be completed and the draft will be shared with the AP for review. Staff noted that these were the only updates under the strategic planning agenda item.

9. Other Business

An AP member requested that future AP meetings be scheduled at more appropriate times to better accommodate member availability.

10. Public Comment

Motusa Nua said he had recently met with the Governor, who was caught off guard and not fully briefed on the issue, including the letter regarding opening the 50-nm area to longline fishing. He said that they would work with the Governor to rescind that letter. He expressed concern that decisions were being influenced by longline owners and emphasized that the matter affects not just Manu'a but the entire territory and future generations. He noted that DMWR lacks a progressive program to train young fishermen and build future capacity and said he has returned to American Samoa for 12 years and consistently heard that the territory lacks data. He described past programs as unsustainable and said the discussion has focused on longliners without addressing culture, tradition, and the broader population. He cautioned that only a small number of voices are being treated as representing all of American Samoa and urged the Council to do better in capturing the true community perspective, including through the Fono. He questioned how the area would be regulated and who would police it, noting that American Samoa has limited enforcement capacity. He stressed the importance of American Samoa demonstrating its partnership and relevance to the United States, especially as China expands its influence in the Pacific. He said American Samoa contributes through its harbors, service members, and natural resources, and that Rose Atoll is an important part of that relevance. Losing it, he said, would weaken American Samoa's position. He concluded by saying the issue is about the future of the territory as a whole, not just Manu'a, and cautioned that "Manu'a" is being used as a catch phrase in the debate.

Brian Peck said the way Rose Atoll was added at the end of the IRA meeting series was not how an issue like this should be handled in American Samoa. He said it should have had its own meeting. He stated that any meeting coming from Manu'a should be considered invalid, but that for the two meetings in Tutuila, no one had heard about the issue, so people had to start contacting others directly. There are a lot of impacts that occur from commercial fishing and mentioned there was one seabird. He explained that there is a difference between other monuments (12–50 for RAMNM and others 50–200). He said sea turtles at Rose Atoll are a hotspot and that all species in this region are supported by Rose. Because of the impacts from commercial fishing, he said it is not worth the risk. Brian stated that longliners are struggling and that, since changes to the LVPA, the boundary has been reduced from 50 miles to 12 miles. He

said the 12–50 mile zone at Rose is already open to fishing. He emphasized that Rose is a small box surrounded by miles of EEZ, and compared to other monuments closed from 50–200 miles, Rose has always been appropriately sized at 50 miles. He concluded that the benefits to species outweigh the potential gains.

Rudy Bartley supported maintaining the status quo, saying there is too much at risk. He noted that the LVPA was originally in place and that the American Samoa longline fleet fought to reopen it with promises of benefits, but those results have not materialized. Now the discussion is about opening the last protected area, and said there are no gains that would justify the change. He referenced earlier points made by Council staff, saying the longline fleet's challenges are not about finding fish but about resources, crew shortages, limited infrastructure, pricing, and competition. He said these issues have solutions and questioned why those solutions aren't the focus instead of opening Rose Atoll. Maintaining the current protections is the most important option. He expressed concern that if fishing is allowed within 50 miles, the longline fleet will eventually push toward the shoreline, and there is already a high level of inaccuracy with what they catch along the way. He advised the AP to recommend the Council maintain the status quo and keep the Manu'a protected areas intact. He referenced economic points raised earlier, noting that the cannery's contributions have been documented by DOC and that American Samoa also supports the Upolu economy. He said the numbers show that 40 percent or more of the money leaves the territory and questioned how that benefits the longline fleet, stating that the data shows the money does not stay in American Samoa.

Natasha Tuato'o-Bartey expressed concern about the amount of longline bycatch entering local stores, noting that it negatively affects local fishermen who rely on selling their catch to make a living. She suggested that taxing this bycatch could potentially generate revenue to support longline operations or local fisheries needs. She emphasized the value of Rose Atoll as an educational resource. Rose atoll could serve as a place to train local fishermen, teach traditional fishing techniques, and build a stronger understanding of local ecosystems. She encouraged the development of educational programs that incorporate Rose Atoll, noting that such efforts would help strengthen local capacity and benefit the broader community.

Andra Samoa said that she has been very involved in environmental and conservation work and also serves as a public policy advisor to the Governor. She said this is why she helped bring members from Manu'a, including district leaders, to meet with the Governor earlier in the day. While the Manu'a group presented their concerns, she explained that her own justification for protecting Rose Atoll comes from an environmental and cultural perspective. She emphasized the importance of the Deeds of Cession, explaining that Rose Atoll is referenced there along with the history of the LVPA issue. She noted several federal regulations and proclamations that apply to Rose Atoll including Executive Order 14276, Proclamation 8337, Proclamation 10918, and the regulatory authority under the Magnuson–Stevens Act. She indicated that many of these federal authorities are in conflict with one another, and that part of her role is to point out those conflicts to ensure the Deeds of Cession and sacred grounds are protected. She added that the meeting was long and presented entirely in English, and questioned how this information could be taken back and explained to Samoan grandfathers and grandmothers in Manu'a who are directly connected to these issues. She stressed the need to ensure elders and community members can understand the implications for culture, land, and future generations.

Vera Peck supported keeping the status quo for Rose Atoll and shared statistics on longline and commercial vessels that have run aground in American Samoa. She referenced incidents such as the Seahawk grounding visible near the airport which has an estimated \$4 million removal and restoration cost, and the 2018 Chu Zai Fa grounding in Leone that resulted in an oil spill and reef damage that remains unpaid. She noted that earlier comments from Mark Fitchett outlined economic stressors facing the longline fleet but emphasized that there are many other factors affecting their operations. She highlighted that Rose Atoll has had longstanding support from all current and past governors, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and ASG working together for decades on habitat restoration and protection. Vera stressed that protecting Rose Atoll is not only about tuna but also about safeguarding turtles, seabirds, and other species that depend on the area's pristine habitat. She encouraged maintaining the existing protections.

11. Discussion and Recommendations

The AP deferred making a recommendation on commercial fishing in the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument for its next formal meeting.

Meeting ended at 9:06 pm