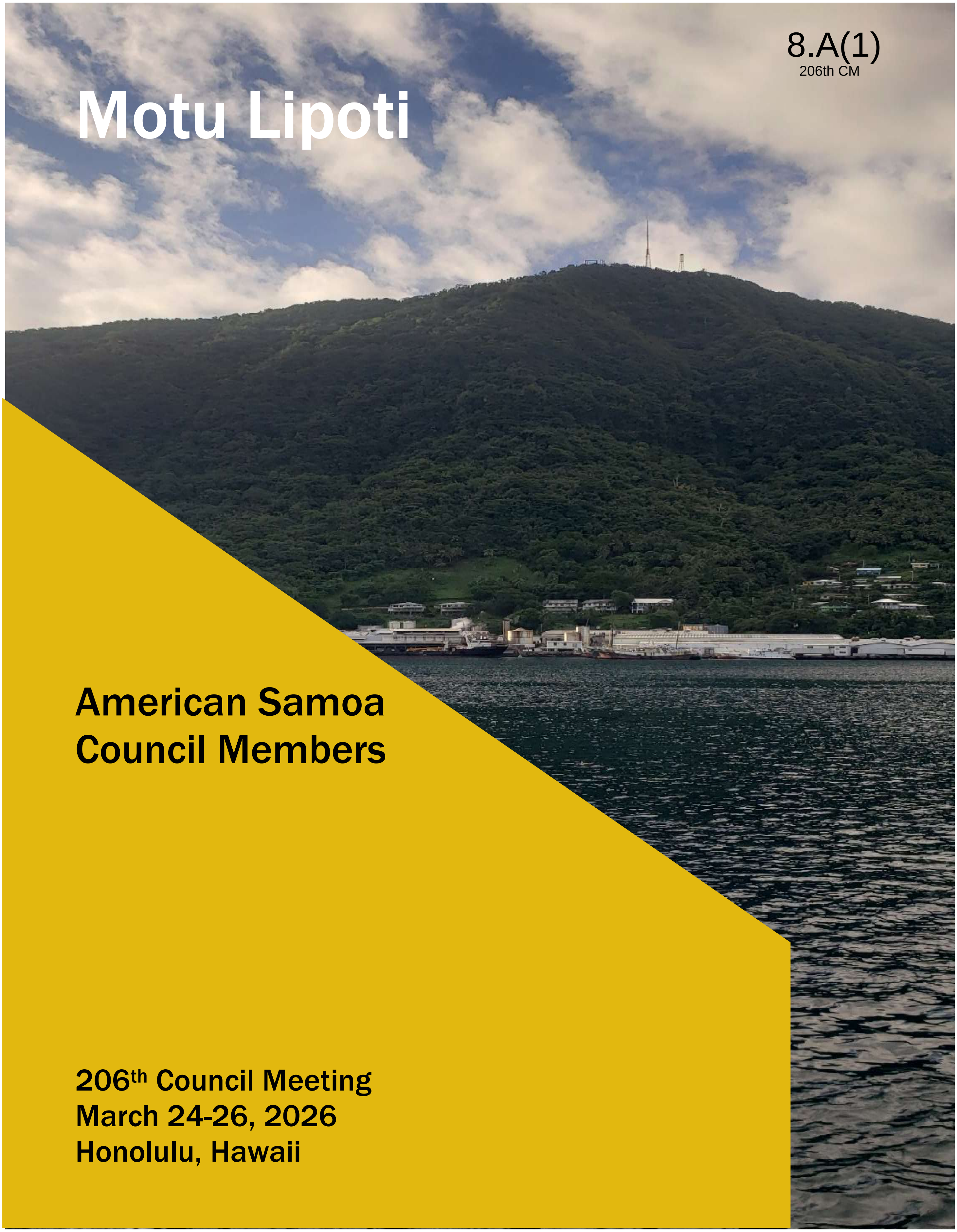
8.A(1)
206th CM

# Motu Lipoti



## American Samoa Council Members

206th Council Meeting
March 24-26, 2026
Honolulu, Hawaii

# The 23rd Annual Steinlager I'a Lapo'a Fishing Tournament

| | |
|---|---|
| When: | April 17, 2026 to April 25, 2026 |
| Where: | Malaloa Marina, American Samoa |
| Hosted By: | Steinlager (Sunshine Inc.) & The Pago Pago Gamefishing Association (PPGFA) |

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

**Friday April 17th, 2026 @ 3:00pm**
Pre-Registration
Malaloa Marina

**Saturday April 18th, 2026 @ 5:00pm**
Captain's meeting
Malaloa Marina

**Monday April 20th, 2026 - Shotgun Start***
Shotgun start @ 6am*
**Boats are requested to participate in shotgun start for media opportunity*
Malaloa Marina
Last Weigh In @ 5pm

**Tuesday April 21st 2026**
Malaloa Marina
Starting Time (lines out) 5:00am
Last Weigh In @ 5pm

***Wednesday April 22nd 2026 – rest***

**Thursday April 23rd 2026**
Malaloa Marina
Starting Time (lines out) 5:00am
Last Weigh In @ 5pm

**Friday April 24th 2026**
Malaloa Marina
Starting Time (lines out) 5:00am
Last Weigh In @ 5pm

**Saturday April 25th 2025 - Closing Banquet**
Venue to be announced
Doors Open @ 4:30pm
Program Starts @ 5:30pm

***Events subject to change due to weather conditions.***

Report on the Current Status of

# American Samoa Longline Fisheries

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council

*March 2026 | Prepared for the Council's 206th Meeting | March 24–26, 2026*


## Summary

The American Samoa longline fishery enters 2026 in a state of cautious resilience. Fishing performance has shown modest year-over-year improvement, and current albacore prices reflect encouraging movement. Yet beneath these incremental gains lies a fishery under sustained and compounding pressure: a chronic shortage of U.S.-licensed masters continues to constrain fleet operations; critical vessel maintenance has been deferred amid cash flow difficulties; geopolitical instability in the Middle East threatens to sharply increase fuel and oil costs; and the absence of a local liferaft servicing facility imposes an ongoing financial burden that disproportionately affects our remote territory. Meanwhile, the fleet's operational survival continues to depend in meaningful part on the goodwill and flexibility of a local shipyard that itself faces financial strain. It is our hope that by bringing these issues into clear focus, we can work collectively — as an industry and as a Council — to address what are genuine structural vulnerabilities before they result in permanent contraction of this vital U.S. domestic fishery.


## Key Developments and Issues — March 2026

### 1. Albacore Prices

The latest MSC-certified albacore pricing data (released March 2, 2026) reflects a notable improvement: prices have reached $3,170/MT (10 kg and up, Gutted and Gilled, MSC-certified), representing an 11.6% increase compared to the same period last year ($2,840/MT in March 2025). While this trend is encouraging and reflects strengthening global demand, it must be placed in proper context. The looming threat of substantially higher fuel and oil costs — driven by ongoing conflict in the Middle East — stands to erode, if not fully negate, any margin gains derived from improved pricing. The fishery should not be lulled into optimism by price movement alone without addressing its cost-side vulnerabilities.

### 2. Fishing Effort and Catch

Year-to-date catch levels in early 2026 are trending modestly above the same period in 2025. This is a positive indicator, particularly given the operational challenges the fleet has navigated. Higher CPUE and improved fishing conditions have contributed to this performance. The fleet is cautiously optimistic, though operators remain acutely aware that bait access, fuel costs, and crew availability will be the deciding factors in sustaining this trajectory through the remainder of the year.

### 3. Bait Supply

The persistent bait supply disruptions that hampered fleet operations throughout much of 2025 — including the StarKist shipment delays reported at the December meeting — have been substantially alleviated. Bait availability has stabilized entering 2026, removing one of the more immediate operational bottlenecks for active vessels. The Council and industry are encouraged to maintain oversight of this supply chain to prevent recurrence of the disruptions that cost the fleet significant operational days in the prior year.

## 4. Chronic Shortage of U.S. Licensed Masters

The inability to reliably procure U.S.-licensed vessel masters remains one of the most persistent and structurally limiting challenges facing the American Samoa longline fleet. Vessels that are otherwise seaworthy and ready to fish continue to sit idle — or operate with suboptimal crew configurations — simply because there is no pool of qualified U.S. masters available to the fleet at competitive terms. This is not a new problem, and its continued presence in some of the previous fleet status reports underscores the need for a durable, policy-level solution. The Tautai-O-Samoa Longline Fishing Association is well aware that any exemption from the federal manning requirement — which mandates that a vessel's master be a U.S. citizen or national — cannot be addressed through regulatory action alone; it would require a congressional act or amendment. To that end, the Association has reached out directly to Congresswoman Uifa'atali Amata Radewagen to explore a legislative pathway. Regrettably, as of the date of this report, that outreach has gone unanswered by the Congresswoman's office. We remain hopeful that this dialogue can be opened, as a territory-specific legislative solution could meaningfully alleviate one of the fleet's most persistent operational constraints.

## 5. Deferred Vessel Maintenance and Shipyard Dependencies

Much-needed maintenance work across the fleet remains on hold. Vessels continue to operate with deferred repairs due to the financial pressures outlined throughout this report — including stagnant revenues relative to operating costs, and the crew availability problem. The longer maintenance is deferred, the greater the eventual cost and the higher the safety risk.

The local shipyard, has again demonstrated extraordinary commitment to the fleet's survival. Through flexible repair scheduling, deferred billing arrangements, and prioritized service for active vessels, the shipyard has functioned as a de facto financial partner for an industry that has few others. However, a critical and growing concern must be acknowledged: the shipyard itself is in need of an influx of funds to continue operating at the capacity the fleet requires. The shipyard is not simply a vendor to the fishing industry — it is core local infrastructure, and its financial health is directly linked to the viability of the fleet. If the shipyard is allowed to deteriorate or reduce its services due to lack of capitalization, the consequences for the fleet would be severe and likely irreversible. Notably, the shipyard has been exploring the possibility of establishing a certified liferaft servicing capability right here in American Samoa — a development that would address one of the fleet's most persistent and costly compliance burdens. However, this initiative is entirely contingent on securing adequate funding to make it a reality. We hope that together, we can identify mechanisms — whether through federal investment, territory-level support, or other financing instruments — that could help sustain and grow this critical local asset.

## 6. Middle East Conflict and Fuel/Oil Cost Exposure

The ongoing conflict in the Middle East presents a material and near-term financial risk to the American Samoa longline fishery. Global fuel and oil markets remain highly sensitive to escalation in the region, and the fleet — which already operates at thin margins in one of the world's most remote fishing territories — is particularly exposed. Any substantial increase in fuel prices will hit the fleet asymmetrically: longer transit distances to productive grounds, limited ability to hedge fuel costs, and an absence of the scale efficiencies enjoyed by larger fleets mean that cost increases translate almost directly into losses. It is worth exploring, collectively, what mechanisms — such as fuel cost assistance programs or emergency economic relief provisions — might be available to buffer the territory's fishers against price shocks that are entirely outside their control.

### 7. Absence of a Local Liferaft Servicing Facility

The lack of a certified liferaft servicing facility in American Samoa continues to impose a recurring and disproportionate financial burden on fleet operators. Under current requirements, when a vessel's liferaft reaches its service interval or expiration, operators in American Samoa face a stark and absurd economic reality: shipping a liferaft to Los Angeles for certified servicing — and then returning it — costs more than replacing the unit outright. As a result, operators are routinely forced to simply purchase new liferafts rather than maintain existing ones. This is a direct and measurable consequence of geographic remoteness that federal maritime safety regulations have failed to account for.

This is not a minor logistical inconvenience. It represents a gap in federal maritime safety infrastructure that unfairly penalizes operators in U.S. territories. The U.S. Coast Guard is aware of the issue and continues to look into available options. While that process plays out, the most viable near-term solution — one that keeps safety firmly at the forefront — is the development of a certified liferaft servicing facility right here in Pago Pago. The local shipyard has expressed genuine interest in becoming a certified facility and liferaft service provider, which would resolve this issue entirely for the fleet and for other maritime operators across the territory. As with other shipyard initiatives, this is contingent on the availability of adequate funding. It is our hope that this locally-grounded solution can receive the attention and support it deserves from the appropriate federal agencies and programs.

## Conclusion

The American Samoa longline fishery enters the March 2026 Council meeting with a mixed but honest picture: fishing performance is marginally improved, albacore prices are moving in the right direction, and bait access has stabilized. These are genuine positives. But they do not offset the structural vulnerabilities that continue to define the fleet's operating environment — a lack of qualified U.S. masters, deferred vessel maintenance, a financially strained local shipyard, the constant threat of fuel price volatility, and an unresolved liferaft servicing gap that penalizes operators for the simple fact of where they live and work.

The fleet has shown resilience. The shipyard has shown commitment. It is our sincere hope that through continued collaboration with the Council, and with the support of our federal partners, the structural challenges documented in this report can be meaningfully addressed — not only for the benefit of the fleet, but for the broader community and economy of American Samoa that depends on it.

**Report Date:** March 2026