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DMWR REPORT FOR 206th MEETING OF THE WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Overview

This report provides a consolidated set of departmental updates from the American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) since the 205th meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council held in December of last year. The updates summarize key actions undertaken to strengthen the scientific foundation for management, improve the quality and continuity of fishery-dependent data, sustain locally based fishing operations, address urgent small-boat infrastructure constraints, reduce federal compliance risk in capacity-building programs, and expand regional and federal coordination relevant to American Samoa's fisheries and marine resource priorities. Updates also include DMWR participation in the South Pacific Group (SPG) meeting in the Cook Islands in February 2026, where discussions emphasized the need to advance and align South Pacific albacore allocation positions ahead of WCPFC, and to ensure any allocation framework is supported by credible monitoring, reporting, and verification systems.

Since the December 205th Council meeting, the following eight areas reflect DMWR's main activities and updates that are of note to the Council:

1. Scientific coordination and capacity-building with NOAA PIFSC to advance bottomfish life history sampling, develop a Samoa-specific fishery-independent bottomfish survey, and improve creel survey documentation, data integrity, and reporting readiness.
2. Implementation planning for a small-boat point-based prioritization system to improve transparency and defensibility in how limited support benefits are allocated, while also incentivizing routine trip reporting in anticipation of a potential shift from random intercept methods to a total census approach in the boat-based fishery.
3. Launch of the American Samoa longline fuel subsidy under the Sustainable Fisheries Fund (SFF) to provide near-term trip-verified fuel cost relief and stabilize locally based longline operations during periods of high operating costs.
4. Initiation of a new floating dock design effort for Malaloa and Fagatogo to address marina congestion, restore safe docking access for alia and other small boats, and establish a construction-ready engineering foundation for future capital funding.

5. Proposed revisions to the CRCP-funded DMWR-ASCC marine science scholarship program to clarify contracting authority, strengthen compliance and governance, and better align the program with long-term local workforce development objectives.
6. Monitoring and situational awareness regarding NOAA-led deep-sea mapping activities in federal waters off American Samoa, focused on baseline characterization and data products relevant to future policy discussions with potential ecosystem and fisheries implications.
7. Expanded engagement with SPC FAME to improve tuna data systems, biological sampling, tagging participation, and regional capacity development through planned in-country trainings and related workshops.
8. Regional coordination through SPG, including February 2026 discussions on South Pacific albacore allocation and interim measure implementation needs, improvements to electronic reporting and unloading data verification, and the development of pooled catch dashboards to support allocation credibility and quarterly reporting ahead of WCPFC.

PIFSC-DMWR Life History & Fishery Independent Survey Engagement

During the week of February 9, 2026, the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center Fisheries Research and Monitoring Division conducted a comprehensive series of coordination meetings, technical training, and community workshops in partnership with the American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources. These activities advanced the American Samoa Archipelago Bottomfish Life History Project and the development of a Samoa-specific fishery-independent survey for deep-slope bottomfish. The visiting team consisted of Marlowe Sabater, Eva Schemmel and Benjamin Richards.

The visit began with internal coordination between PIFSC and DMWR leadership and technical staff from the Boat-based and shore-based creel survey program, Key Reef program and FAD division to align objectives, review presentation materials, and confirm logistical arrangements for the week's engagements. These sessions ensured that outreach to fishermen was clear, locally grounded, and responsive to the current bottomfish stock assessment context. The coordination reinforced a shared commitment to strengthening the scientific foundation for bottomfish management in American Samoa.

Community Constituents Kickoff Meeting

On February 10, 2026, DMWR and PIFSC jointly hosted a public constituents meeting in the evening at the Tradewinds Hotel for the small boat bottomfish community. The meeting was very well-attended and successfully covered all planned agenda items and fostered open dialogue between agency staff and fishermen.

Presentations provided historical context for fishery-independent surveys in the Pacific Islands Region and explained how stock assessments serve as the primary scientific foundation for fisheries management. PIFSC staff reviewed the 2023 bottomfish stock assessment, noting that while the stock is currently considered healthy, important uncertainties remain. A key area identified for improvement is the need for local life history data, including age, growth, and reproductive information specific to American Samoa bottomfish species.

The meeting clarified the difference between commercial fishing and research fishing, emphasizing how standardized survey methods, stratified sampling, and consistent gear protocols differ from typical fishing practices. Demonstrations of otolith extraction and fish aging methods were provided, and

fishermen engaged in meaningful discussion regarding biosampling and survey participation. The session strengthened understanding within the fishing community of how improved data collection directly supports sustained fishing opportunities and informed management decisions.

Bottomfish Fisher Workshop – Survey Design and Implementation

On February 11, 2026, a focused workshop was conducted with active bottomfish fishermen to collaboratively refine the design and operational components of the proposed fishery-independent survey. The session moved from conceptual discussions to practical implementation planning. Topics addressed included defining the survey domain within the 75–400 meter Essential Fish Habitat depth range, identifying priority species within the former Bottomfish Management Unit Species complex, and evaluating depth stratification and habitat considerations. Fishermen provided valuable input regarding key fishing areas and banks that best represent local fishing patterns.

Gear standardization was a central component of the workshop. Discussions included:

- Reel and line configurations
- Hook sizes and bait selection
- Use of flashers, glow beads, and palu
- Lessons learned from survey gear trials in other Pacific jurisdictions

This collaborative process resulted in a better idea of areas to include in the survey and the fishermen came to a consensus that for the gear, they would use a rig with three hooks, short monofilament leader and no flasher or chum bag. These are the type of collaborative efforts with fishermen that help to inform the upcoming survey work by maintaining scientific rigor while also reflecting local fishing practices. This concept of for American Samoa fishermen, by American Samoa fishermen was well-received. Interested fishermen were also invited to participate in the upcoming bottomfish survey and were given forms to complete, further strengthening local partnership in the project.

Life History Training and Capacity Building

On February 12, 2026, PIFSC conducted retraining with DMWR staff on life history sampling procedures. The training reinforced technical skills in otolith extraction, fish aging protocols, and reproductive data collection methods. An inventory of life history supplies was completed, and additional capacity-building needs were identified to ensure continuity of sampling beyond the current engagement.

The training enhanced DMWR's ability to independently collect and process biological samples critical to improving stock assessments. Emphasis was placed on establishing consistent best practices for engaging fishermen in biosampling efforts and maintaining quality control throughout the data collection process.

Creel Survey QA/QC and Data System Improvements

Throughout the week, PIFSC and DMWR staff conducted a comprehensive review of boat-based and shore-based creel survey programs. The team documented survey design and implementation procedures in preparation for certification requirements and conducted a semi-annual audit of the creel database. Specific actions included:

- Reviewing data management workflows for the upcoming SAFE reporting cycle
- Evaluating recommended improvements to boat-based data collection
- Finalizing documentation for shore-based creel protocols

These efforts significantly strengthened data integrity, documentation standards, and readiness for federal reporting requirements.

Strategic Coordination and Management Integration

DMWR and PIFSC leadership held extended coordination sessions focused on integrating fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data streams, advancing the bottomfish stock assessment update, and aligning research activities with the draft American Samoa Bottomfish Fishery Management Plan. Discussions addressed long-term strategies for improving size-structured abundance and biomass estimates and establishing a sustained pathway for life history biosample collection.

Importantly, PIFSC demonstrated a clear commitment to understanding the operational, logistical, and cultural realities of fisheries in American Samoa. The collaborative approach prioritized development of a survey and data collection strategy tailored specifically to local conditions rather than applying a pre-existing external model.

Overall Outcomes

All planned objectives for the February 2026 visit were successfully completed. The engagement resulted in:

- Strengthened collaboration between DMWR, PIFSC, and the bottomfish fishing community
- Increased industry understanding of stock assessment science and survey methodology
- Fisher-informed survey design parameters for the BFISH-LH project
- Enhanced local life history sampling capacity
- Improved creel survey documentation and quality control procedures
- Clear next steps for implementation of a Samoa-specific fishery-independent survey

This coordinated effort represents a meaningful advancement in reducing scientific uncertainty, strengthening bottomfish assessments, and ensuring that future management decisions affecting American Samoa's fishing community are grounded in robust, locally informed data.

Longline Fuel Subsidy

The American Samoa Longline Fuel Subsidy was approved under the Sustainable Fisheries Fund (SFF) 2025 award and formally authorized in February 2026. This approval allows eligible American Samoa-based longline vessel owners to begin submitting reimbursement requests for qualifying fuel expenses associated with verified fishing trips. The program is intended to provide near-term economic relief to the local longline fleet while supporting continued fishing operations that are essential to the territory's economy and food security.

Under the approved award, the subsidy applies to fuel used for eligible longline fishing trips conducted between September 1, 2025 and December 2026. Only fuel associated with active fishing trips qualifies for reimbursement. Shore-side operations, non-fishing travel, or unrelated vessel activities are not covered. All trips must be verified through DMWR's established trip verification process to ensure consistency, accountability, and compliance with SFF requirements.

The reimbursement mechanism is structured as a partial fuel cost offset rather than full coverage. Vessel owners are required to submit fuel receipts or invoices along with a completed longline trip verification form and any additional documentation requested by DMWR. Reimbursements are processed only after review and confirmation that trips meet eligibility criteria, ensuring that SFF funds are used strictly for their intended purpose.

Fuel remains one of the most significant and unpredictable operating costs for the American Samoa longline fleet. Fluctuating fuel prices directly affect trip planning, vessel profitability, and the overall viability of locally based operations. By reducing a portion of these costs, the fuel subsidy is intended

to stabilize fleet operations, encourage continued participation in the fishery, and help vessel owners maintain regular fishing activity during periods of elevated operating expenses.

Program Purpose and Benefits

The fuel subsidy is designed to:

- Offset rising and volatile fuel costs that impact trip-level profitability
- Support the continued operation of locally based longline vessels
- Maintain consistent supply of albacore and other tuna to the Pago Pago cannery
- Strengthen food security, employment, and related economic activity in the territory
- Reinforce a sustained U.S. fishing presence in the American Samoa EEZ

Eligibility and Coverage

- Applies to verified longline fishing trips conducted between September 1, 2025 and December 2026
- Limited to eligible American Samoa–based longline vessels
- Covers fuel used directly for fishing trips only
- Requires submission of receipts and DMWR trip verification documentation

Beyond its immediate economic function, the fuel subsidy reflects the broader policy objective of both the Council and the current administration to prioritize sustaining a locally based, compliant, and economically viable longline fleet in American Samoa. The program recognizes the fleet’s role not only in supporting the territory’s private-sector economy but also in maintaining domestic seafood production and reinforcing American Samoa’s long-term interests in fisheries governance and maritime presence in the central Pacific.

CIMAR–PIFSC Ecosystem Sciences Division ESA Coral Research Visit

In February 2026, the Cooperative Institute for Marine and Atmospheric Research (CIMAR) Ecosystem Sciences Division team, in coordination with NOAA’s Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC), conducted field and experimental work on Tutuila focused on ESA-listed coral species and reef resilience science. DMWR supported the mission through permitting coordination, logistics, equipment support, and engagement with local partners and communities.

Field Operations (Fixed-Site Re-Imaging and Environmental Monitoring)

Over 11 dive days, the team successfully re-imaged 16 fixed monitoring sites. Several sites were intentionally co-located with long-term partner monitoring locations, including four NCRMP sites, two CRAG sites, and one NMSAS site, strengthening cross-program comparability and integration. In total, the team collected more than 74,000 Structure-from-Motion (SfM) images, which will be used to quantify colony-scale growth and mortality for over 100 *Acropora globiceps* colonies and thousands of *Isopora crateriformis* colonies. The team also retrieved underwater temperature loggers deployed at project sites. Upon completion of SfM processing, the team will share site imagery and derived 3D models with CRAG and NMSAS to support local analysis, monitoring continuity, and management application.

Experimental Heat Stress Testing (CBASS) and Genetics

The team conducted eight acute heat stress (CBASS) experiments to evaluate coral thermal tolerance across multiple species, including ESA-listed *Acropora globiceps* (64 colonies) and *Isopora crateriformis* (65 colonies), as well as *Acropora abrotanoides* (21 colonies) and *Acropora hyacinthus* (17 colonies). Genetic material was collected from all experimental colonies, with follow-on laboratory work planned to begin DNA extraction and sequencing to identify coral symbiont species. These

analyses are intended to provide insight into physiological and symbiont-related mechanisms underlying thermal sensitivity and resilience.

Visiting Scientist Collaboration and Predictive Bleaching Model Development

The mission also included collaboration with visiting scientist Sophie Wong (PhD student, University of Alabama; Ken Hoadley lab at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab). During the mission, Wong deployed her lab's fluorometer alongside CBASS experiments to correlate photophysiological measurements with heat-stress responses. She conducted additional physiological assessments on 137 colonies. The long-term objective of this collaboration is to develop a predictive bleaching model that enables managers and scientists to non-destructively assess thermal tolerance of healthy corals in situ, improving management applicability without requiring repeated heat-stress experiments.

Partner Engagement and Data Integration Support

The team met with NOAA Fisheries, CRAG, DMWR, the National Park of American Samoa (NPS), and NMSAS to share methods, summarize progress, and outline next steps. DMWR and CRAG personnel supported field operations, including direct assistance during one of the heat stress experiment days. CRAG also shared 4,200 photoquadrat images from long-term monitoring sites in Tutuila and the Manu'a Islands, which will be used to beta-test an operational AI tool designed to identify the two ESA-listed coral species from partner imagery, improving efficiency and consistency in future monitoring workflows.

Overall Outcome and Next Steps

This mission advanced ESA coral objectives across fixed-site monitoring, experimental biology, genetics, predictive modeling, and AI-assisted monitoring tool development. Successful implementation required coordinated permitting and local engagement, including advance coordination with village leadership. The team has indicated plans for a report-out meeting in late fall 2026 to present results and management-relevant findings to partners in American Samoa.

New Floating Dock Design for Pago Pago Harbor

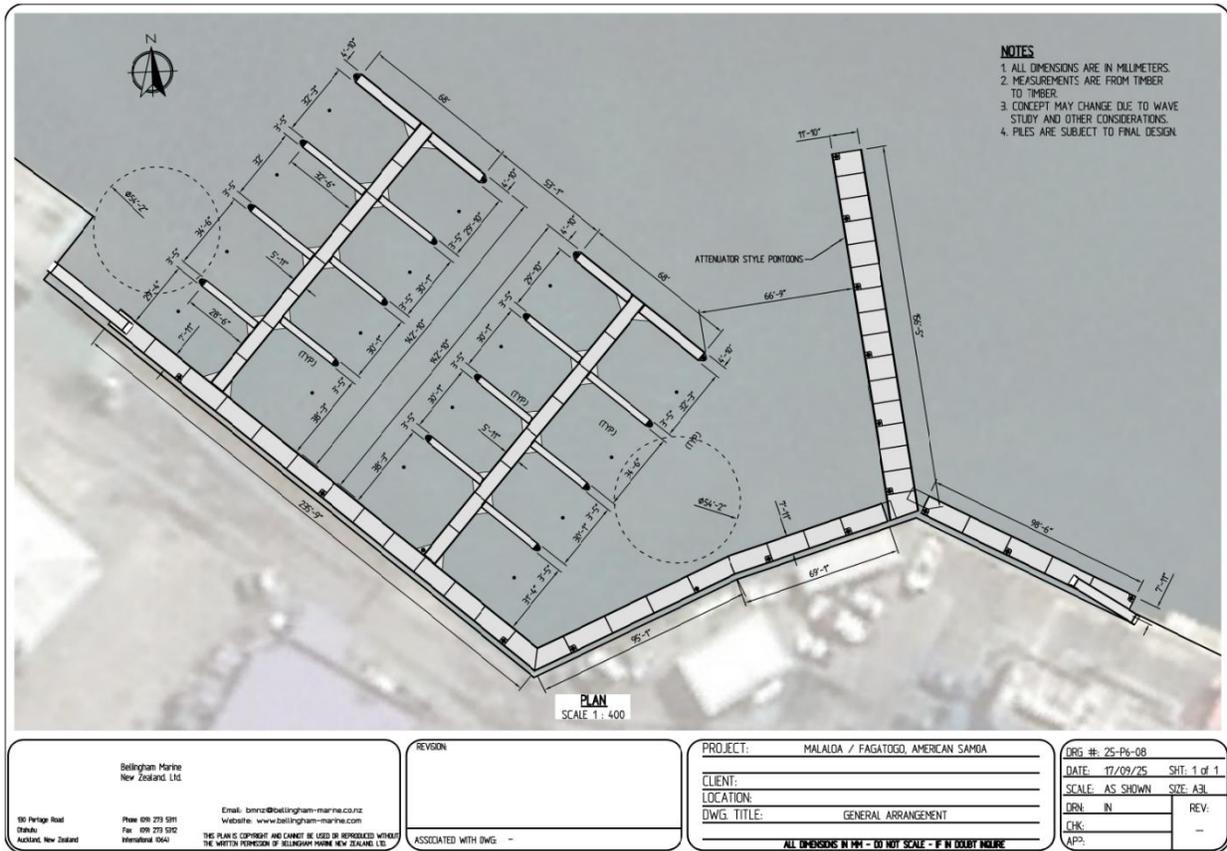
DMWR entered into a design contract with Bellingham Marine New Zealand to develop a floating dock system for Malaloa and Fagatogo in response to increasingly urgent infrastructure limitations affecting American Samoa's small-boat fishing sector. The existing floating docks are no longer usable, forcing temporary reassignment of slips originally intended for recreational and charter vessels to alia and other small fishing boats. This has resulted in congestion at the marina, uncertainty for vessel operators returning from fishing trips, and rising tension among user groups. DMWR has managed the situation through rotating use of the remaining slips, but the current conditions present operational and safety concerns and are not sustainable.

The design effort reflects the need to move from temporary workarounds toward a long-term infrastructure solution. Small-boat fisheries rely on consistent and safe docking access for offloading, vessel support, and participation in the local fishing economy. Without replacement infrastructure, congestion and safety risks at the marina will persist and likely worsen. The project therefore focuses on restoring functionality and building resilience into the territory's small-boat infrastructure rather than simply expanding convenience.

In September, DMWR contracted Bellingham Marine New Zealand to produce a professional floating dock design package to support eventual construction. The contract provided the technical foundation needed to advance procurement and funding discussions. The contractor delivered base marina specifications, a wave climate assessment, and engineering design materials to guide attenuator and dock configuration at the Malaloa/Fagatogo site.

The marina specification package outlines structural requirements and materials appropriate for a durable floating system, including pile-supported pontoons, corrosion-resistant components, and provisions for safe mooring, utilities, and fish-cleaning access. The design is intended to meet recognized engineering and marina standards and support long-term maintenance efficiency.

The wave climate assessment examined conditions within Pago Pago Harbor to inform dock placement and attenuator performance. The harbor benefits from natural sheltering, but cyclonic conditions remain the governing design factor. The analysis incorporated multiple recurrence scenarios to ensure structural resilience and operational safety under both routine and extreme weather conditions.



The design effort also reflects DMWR’s broader infrastructure objectives. Existing boating infrastructure at Malaloa has experienced extensive wear over time, and the floating dock concept is intended to provide a durable and functional replacement that supports fishing operations and community use.

Objectives of the floating dock design

- Restore safe and reliable docking access for small-boat fisheries
- Reduce congestion and improve operational efficiency at the marina
- Support offloading, vessel access, and day-to-day fishing activity
- Provide infrastructure resilient to variable winds, waves, and water levels
- Minimize long-term maintenance through appropriate materials and engineering design

Deliverables provided under the contract

- Design No. 8 general arrangement concept and layout
- Incident wave climate study
- Base marina specification package for tender development

- Supporting engineering drawings and planning documentation

The contractor provided an estimated contract value of US \$33,255.42 for the floating dock design services, based on direct correspondence during the design process. Construction-level funding will be required to move the project from design to implementation. Capital Improvement Program funding, or a similar construction-focused source, is necessary to close the gap and address the current infrastructure deficit.

The floating dock design contract therefore represents the first step in a phased infrastructure effort. The technical work completed under this contract provides the foundation for future construction funding requests, procurement planning, and implementation. Without investment in construction, the marina's current congestion, safety concerns, and operational limitations will continue to affect the territory's small-boat fishing sector and the broader marine economy.

Small Boat Point-Based Priority System

The American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources has developed a new point-based prioritization system for small boat fishermen to guide the allocation of limited fisheries support resources. This system is intended to improve transparency, consistency, and defensibility in how benefits such as gear upgrades, fuel vouchers or subsidies, and training opportunities are distributed, particularly when demand exceeds available funding or program capacity.

The point-based system responds to longstanding challenges in American Samoa, including limited fisheries-dependent data, constrained funding, and the need to balance fisheries development with conservation, safety, and compliance objectives. Rather than relying on ad hoc or discretionary decisions, the framework establishes a structured method for ranking eligible fishermen based on measurable participation and behavior that directly supports fisheries management goals.

A central feature of the system is its emphasis on catch data submission. Fishermen earn points for each verified fishing trip reported to DMWR through approved data collection methods, with additional points awarded for consistent reporting over time. This approach is designed to strengthen the quality and continuity of fisheries data used in stock assessments, management planning, and Council deliberations, while also reinforcing the importance of routine data submission by the fishing community.

The system also awards points for participation in fisheries-related training, workshops, and public meetings. These activities support improved safety at sea, greater regulatory awareness, and more informed engagement in the fisheries management process. By recognizing participation in both training and public processes, the framework encourages fishermen to remain actively involved in management discussions that affect their livelihoods.

Community engagement and organized fishing activities are also recognized within the point structure. Fishermen receive points for participation in registered local fishing tournaments and DMWR-led youth or community outreach events. Additional points are awarded when tournament participation includes full catch data submission, reinforcing the link between fishing activity, data collection, and community involvement.

Regulatory compliance and good standing are integral to the framework. Fishermen who maintain full compliance with applicable laws and regulations earn points over time, while limited points may be earned for voluntary correction of minor violations or participation in compliance education. At the same time, the system includes clear point deductions for violations such as fishing without a valid

license, operating an unregistered vessel, engaging in illegal fishing practices, or conducting prohibited activities at marinas and floating docks. Repeat or serious violations result in increased point deductions and may lead to temporary or permanent ineligibility, regardless of accumulated points. Points accumulate continuously with no annual caps, allowing long-term participation, compliance, and data contribution to be meaningfully reflected in priority rankings. When program benefits become available, eligible fishermen are ranked by total points and grouped into priority tiers, with tie-breakers based on recent data submission, compliance history, and, where appropriate, operations in Manu'a or other remote areas.

Administration of the system is coordinated across relevant DMWR divisions through a centralized point ledger linked to fishing licenses and vessel registrations. Fishermen may request point summaries or reviews, and DMWR may publish non-identifying aggregate information to promote transparency and accountability.

Overall, the point-based prioritization system provides DMWR with a practical tool to align fisheries assistance with data needs, compliance, safety, and community engagement. The framework supports sustainable fisheries development while accounting for the importance of fishing communities and improving the foundation for informed management decisions.

CRCP Funded DMWR-American Samoa Community College Scholarship

DMWR has requested several targeted revisions to the existing American Samoa marine science scholarship program to improve legal clarity, federal compliance, governance, and alignment with territorial capacity-building objectives. These proposed changes are intended to strengthen the program going forward and ensure it continues to serve American Samoa's long-term fisheries and natural resource management needs.

First, DMWR has requested that the scholarship Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) be revised to formally designate DMWR as the contracting party rather than the Coral Reef Advisory Group (CRAG). CRAG functions as a programmatic body housed within DMWR and is not a separate legal entity. Updating the MOU to reflect DMWR as the signatory agency will clarify signature authority, fiscal responsibility, and accountability for federal funds.

Second, DMWR has requested that the scholarship eligibility criteria be revised to explicitly limit eligibility to U.S. citizens or U.S. nationals, consistent with standard federal funding requirements applicable to NOAA-supported education and capacity-building programs. The proposed revision would also require verification of citizenship or national status prior to an application being accepted for review and prior to any award being made. This change is intended to reduce federal audit risk and ensure compliance with applicable funding rules.

Third, DMWR has recommended that the scholarship MOU clearly articulate that the program is not only an academic support mechanism, but also a capacity-building initiative designed to develop a qualified local workforce for American Samoa. The revised language would emphasize the program's role in preparing future professionals for marine science, fisheries management, conservation, and natural resource management positions, including potential employment with DMWR and other territorial agencies.

Fourth, DMWR has proposed revisions to the scholarship review and selection process to ensure formal institutional participation by the American Samoa Community College (ASCC). Under the proposed framework, scholarship decisions would be made jointly by one designated representative from DMWR and one designated representative from ASCC, with technical advisors, such as Sea

Grant, serving in an advisory rather than decision-making role. This change is intended to strengthen shared governance, transparency, and institutional accountability.

Fifth, DMWR has recommended improvements to the selection guidelines, including clearer procedures for resolving ties among equally qualified applicants, to improve consistency and defensibility in award decisions.

Finally, DMWR has proposed that future versions of the scholarship program consider incorporating structured experiential and service components, such as internships with DMWR and a post-graduation service or work commitment in American Samoa. These elements would further reinforce the program's core objective of building and retaining local capacity to support fisheries management and marine resource stewardship in the territory.

Collectively, these proposed revisions are intended to preserve the strengths of the existing scholarship program while ensuring it remains compliant, transparent, and closely aligned with American Samoa's fisheries management, workforce development, and long-term sustainability goals.

Deep-Sea Mapping Activities in Federal Waters Off American Samoa

NOAA's National Ocean Service has initiated a major hydrographic survey effort in federal waters off American Samoa, and the Ocean Guardian is now on station and beginning survey operations. This work marks the operational phase of a federally directed effort to map and characterize more than 30,000 square nautical miles of deep ocean area surrounding the Territory.

The project is part of the Department of Commerce's implementation of the U.S. Offshore Critical Minerals Mapping Plan under Executive Order 14285, which calls for accelerated assessment of offshore seabed resources. The focus of the current mission is data acquisition and baseline characterization rather than mineral development. Survey activities include high-resolution seafloor mapping, geospatial data collection, and limited sampling necessary to understand seabed composition and geological features.

The Ocean Guardian, a multi-purpose vessel equipped for advanced offshore survey operations, is conducting the work under contract through NOAA's hydrographic services vendor, NV5. NOAA has allocated approximately \$20 million in fiscal year 2025 funding to support this effort. The deliverables will include publicly accessible bathymetric maps, imagery, and environmental data products intended to inform federal agencies, researchers, and stakeholders about the deep-ocean environment and the potential presence of polymetallic nodules and other critical mineral-bearing formations.

The mineral systems of interest include polymetallic nodules that may contain manganese, nickel, cobalt, copper, and rare earth elements—materials considered strategically important for defense systems, energy infrastructure, advanced manufacturing, and emerging technologies. At present, however, no commercial-scale deep-sea mining has occurred in U.S. waters, and the current mission is limited to mapping and environmental characterization.

NOAA has emphasized that this survey work will generate transparent, high-quality baseline data to improve understanding of the deep-ocean ecosystem in federal waters off American Samoa. The information collected is expected to contribute to broader scientific knowledge, including bathymetric coverage, habitat characterization, and resource assessment. Given that large portions of U.S. waters remain incompletely mapped to modern standards, this effort also advances national ocean mapping priorities.

The data produced through this project may inform future policy discussions regarding offshore mineral resources, but the current phase remains exploratory in nature. The Territory continues to monitor these activities closely, particularly with respect to potential long-term implications for fisheries, marine ecosystems, and the broader economic interests of American Samoa.

SPC Training and Workshops

DMWR met with a representative from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems Division (FAME) to discuss potential collaboration on regional efforts. The discussion focused on American Samoa's participation in improving tuna data systems, biological sampling, tagging, and overall fisheries capacity development by enhancing DMWR's internal data management, improving the quality of fishery-dependent biological data, and increasing involvement in regional scientific and policy initiatives. These all go along with larger

SPC acknowledged American Samoa's leadership in tuna tagging, noting that Pago Pago is currently the highest SPC tag recovery port in the Pacific, with more than 400 tags recovered. This recognition reflects the strong cooperation between local fishermen and DMWR staff. At the same time, SPC emphasized the importance of improving biological data collection, particularly the routine measurement of fish lengths to strengthen stock assessment inputs.

A key outcome of the meeting was agreement for SPC to conduct an in-country training visit focused on strengthening DMWR's tuna data management systems. During a planned two-week visit, SPC will deliver training on the Tufman 2 Tuna Fisheries Data Management System and the IKASAVEA mobile data collection application. DMWR will provide recommended dates for the visit and submit the names, positions, and Gmail accounts of staff requiring system access. SPC also extended an invitation for DMWR participation in a regional IKASAVEA workshop in Apia, which would require submission of a formal letter of request. These training opportunities are expected to significantly enhance DMWR's data management capacity and improve reporting efficiency and compliance with regional obligations.

SPC also outlined upcoming opportunities for participation in regional tuna tagging cruises scheduled for March, July, and November. Each cruise requires an at-sea commitment of more than one month. DMWR will assess staff availability for potential deployment, as participation would provide valuable hands-on experience in tagging methodologies and regional scientific collaboration. In addition, SPC intends to work directly with DMWR staff during their visit to strengthen local protocols for length-frequency data collection.

In early March, SPC will host a biosampling training in Samoa and has invited DMWR to send up to two staff members. This training will focus on standardized biological sampling techniques to improve the quality and consistency of data used in stock assessments. DMWR will need to allocate travel funding to support attendance.

SPC further expressed interest in deploying two oceanographic sensors on local fishing vessels, preferably bottomfish or alia boats. These sensors would transmit sea surface and subsurface temperature data, contributing to broader regional oceanographic monitoring efforts. Vessel owners would be required to sign a memorandum of understanding with SPC, and DMWR will assist in identifying willing participants. This initiative aligns with ecosystem-based management objectives and strengthens American Samoa's integration into regional climate and fisheries monitoring networks.

Finally, SPC reaffirmed its willingness to assist DMWR with tuna policy development and technical analysis as needed. The upcoming Heads of Fisheries meeting in Noumea was also identified as an important regional engagement opportunity. Overall, the coordination with SPC FAME advances DMWR's efforts to improve internal scientific capacity, strengthen data quality, expand regional scientific participation, and reinforce American Samoa's role in Pacific fisheries governance. The American Samoa Government has prioritized having a stronger profile in regional fisheries and governance with organizations like SPC and the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA).