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March 4, 2026

8.C.2 DMWR Participation Point System

Purpose

DMWR has developed a Participation Point System to provide a transparent, consistent, and defensible basis for prioritizing distribution of limited small-boat fisheries support benefits when demand exceeds available resources. Benefits may include gear upgrades, fuel vouchers or subsidies, and training opportunities.

The system aligns fisheries assistance with measurable behaviors that strengthen fisheries management outcomes, especially routine trip and catch reporting, safety participation, community engagement, and regulatory compliance.

Background and Rationale

American Samoa's small-boat fisheries operate in a resource-constrained environment where allocation decisions can become contested if conducted informally. The Participation Point System replaces ad hoc decision-making with a structured framework grounded in documented participation and good standing.

A central objective is to strengthen the quality, frequency, and continuity of catch and effort information used for assessment inputs, management planning, Council deliberations, and federal reporting.

Core Design Principles

- Transparency and defensibility: clear eligibility rules and consistent prioritization logic that can be explained to fishermen, leadership, and federal partners.
- Data-driven incentives: points are primarily earned through verified trip and catch reporting, with additional credit for sustained reporting over time.
- Balanced participation recognition: points also recognize training, workshops, and engagement in public processes that improve safety and management understanding.
- Compliance-centered integrity: compliance and good standing are integral, with defined deductions and ineligibility triggers for violations.
- Long-term participation matters: points accrue over time with no annual caps so long-term consistency is reflected in priority rankings.

How Points Are Earned

DMWR will maintain a point ledger that credits participation across four primary categories. Point weights can be adjusted over time to reflect program goals and stakeholder feedback, but the earning structure is as follows.

Trip and catch reporting (primary driver)

- Points awarded for each verified fishing trip reported to DMWR through approved methods.
- Additional points for consistent reporting over time to reinforce continuity and reduce data gaps.

Training, workshops, and public participation

- Points for participation in fisheries-related trainings and workshops (e.g., safety, reporting practices, regulatory awareness).
- Points for participation in public meetings relevant to fisheries management to encourage informed engagement.

Community engagement and organized fishing activities

- Points for participation in registered local fishing tournaments.
- Additional points when tournament participation includes full catch data submission to reinforce the data-management link.
- Points for participation in DMWR-led youth or community outreach events.

Compliance and good standing

- Points earned over time for maintaining compliance with applicable laws and regulations.
- Where appropriate, DMWR may recognize completion of compliance education or corrective actions for minor issues, consistent with program rules.

Point Deductions and Ineligibility

The system includes defined penalties to ensure benefits support lawful, safe, and accountable fishing activity.

- Point deductions may apply for violations such as fishing without a valid license, operating an unregistered vessel, illegal fishing practices, or prohibited activities at marinas and floating docks.
- Repeat or serious violations may result in temporary or permanent ineligibility, regardless of total accumulated points.

Ranking, Priority Tiers, and Tie-Breakers

When benefits become available, DMWR will confirm eligibility (license and vessel status and good standing), rank eligible fishermen by total points, and group participants into priority tiers.

If ties occur, DMWR will apply documented tie-breakers that may include recent data submission activity, compliance history, and operational factors relevant to equitable access (including remote-area operations such as Manu'a where applicable).

Administration, Recordkeeping, and Transparency

The point ledger will be administered centrally and coordinated across relevant DMWR divisions. Points will be linked to fishing licenses and vessel registrations to ensure traceability and reduce disputes.

Fishermen may request point summaries or reviews, and DMWR may publish non-identifying aggregate participation metrics to support transparency and program accountability.

Integration With Upcoming PIFSC FRMD Data Collection Work

The Participation Point System is designed to directly support upcoming PIFSC Fisheries Research and Monitoring Division (FRMD) collaboration with DMWR to strengthen fishery-dependent data systems.

Incentivizing reporting as DMWR and PIFSC refine boat-based data collection FRMD and DMWR work on survey methods and data workflows depends on consistent, high-quality reporting. The point system operationalizes that need by rewarding verified trip and catch information submitted routinely, improving coverage and continuity.

Supporting readiness for potential higher-coverage approaches
DMWR's data modernization efforts may require higher reporting coverage to improve representativeness and reduce uncertainty. A participation-based incentive structure helps normalize consistent reporting and makes higher-coverage systems more feasible over time.
Strengthening defensibility of management decisions

Improved fishery-dependent reporting supports assessment inputs, strengthens trend detection, and provides a more credible foundation for Council deliberations and future management actions that rely on local data.

Reinforcing collaboration norms and sustained participation
Recent engagement with fishermen through trainings and workshops has built understanding of why standardized data collection matters. The point system reinforces that shared expectation by creating an ongoing structure that rewards continued participation, not only one-time involvement.

Near-Term Implementation Steps

- Finalize administrative SOPs defining eligibility checks, point entry rules, review and appeals, and any planned publication of aggregate metrics.
- Align reporting pathways and verification methods with the boat-based data collection approach being advanced with PIFSC FRMD.
- Launch with clear public communication: how to earn points, what programs the points apply to, and how fishermen can request point summaries.
- Monitor performance and adjust point weights and rules as needed based on reporting frequency, completeness, participation rates, and compliance outcomes.

Expected Outcomes

- Increased routine trip and catch reporting and improved data continuity.

- More defensible and transparent allocation of limited fisheries support benefits.
- Improved readiness for federal reporting expectations and data quality standards.
- Stronger alignment between fisheries assistance programs, compliance expectations, and PIFSC FRMD-supported data collection improvements.