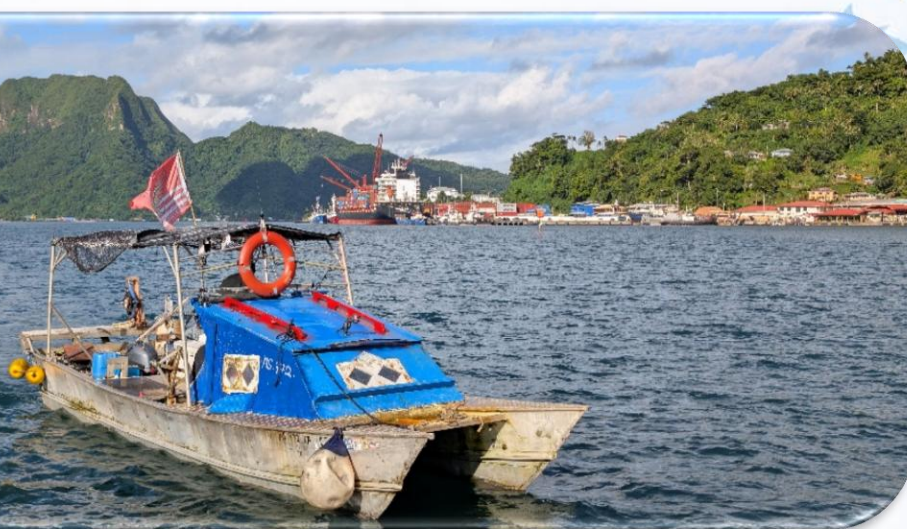


American Samoa Fisheries Outlook



Sousou o le Vasa returns to Pago Pago Harbor after a day on the water during the 3rd Pago Pago Open Fishing Tournament, held June 6. (Photo: Vince Tofilau)

Message from the American Samoa Advisory Panel

Welcome to the third issue of the American Samoa Advisory Panel Newsletter. Our goal, as always, is to keep you informed and make sure your voices are part of how our fisheries are managed.

It's been a busy few months. The Council's 207th meeting here in Pago Pago brought major decisions on tuna allocation and fishing access, and Manu'a residents spoke directly to the Council about what those changes mean for their community — especially with Rose Atoll waters reopening to commercial fishing days later. In this issue, we cover what was said, what changed, and where the Panel fits going forward.

You'll also find updates on the Governor's new Fisheries Task Force, DMWR's point-based system for small-boat fishermen, tournament results, and a look at our Shipyard.

Thank you for staying engaged — your input shapes these decisions.

Lua'ituaa Gene Pan
Vice Chairman

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About the American Samoa Advisory Panel

The AS AP is a group of local fishermen, industry members, and community representatives appointed to advise the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (the Council) on fishery management issues affecting American Samoa. The Panel's recommendations inform the Council's decisions on behalf of the Territory's fishing communities.

207TH COUNCIL MEETING — JUNE 9–11, 2026, PAGO PAGO

Five Things from the 207th Meeting That Matter for American Samoa



Governor Pula'ali'i Nikolao Pula delivers opening remarks at the 207th Council Meeting in Pago Pago. (Photo: Josh DeMello)



South Pacific albacore (Thunnus alalunga) documented during fisheries observation activities in the South Pacific. (Photo: Yen-Chih Chen)

1. Fighting for a Fair Share of Albacore

American Samoa's longline fleet and the cannery it supplies depend heavily on South Pacific albacore. Council Chair Nathan Ilaoa said any allocation for American Samoa should be no lower than 2,250 metric tons, with 2,700 metric tons better reflecting what the local fleet needs to thrive. Council member Edgar Feliciano pressed for an allocation formula based on American Samoa's long-term fishing history, for any American Samoa share to remain transferable, and for tighter restrictions on at-sea transshipment.

2. Rose Atoll Waters Reopen

Council members learned during the meeting that a new presidential proclamation had been signed reopening portions of Rose Atoll Marine National Monument to commercial fishing. See our feature, "What Manu'a Told the Council," on page 4 for the full story.



President Donald J. Trump signs a proclamation restoring commercial fishing access around Rose Atoll, June 11, 2026. (Photo: Joyce N. Boghosian)

3. Electronic Monitoring Moves Forward, Shark Depredation on the Agenda

The Council advanced electronic monitoring (EM) implementation in the American Samoa longline fishery, a step meant to improve data collection while reducing the reporting burden on vessel crews. Members also took up shark depredation — fish lost to sharks before they landed, directing improved reporting and mitigation strategies for the local fleet.

4. Nearly 750,000 Meals — and a New Local Management Plan



Mahi-mahi and wahoo landed during the 3rd Pago Pago Open Fishing Tournament in Pago Pago, American Samoa. (Photo: Vince Tofilau)

A recent survey found that American Samoa's fisheries have provided close to three-quarters of a million meals through community programs, underscoring how central local fishing is to food security here. The Council also discussed continuing fuel-subsidy support for local boats, and the territory is developing an American Samoa Fishery Management Plan to better manage deep-water snappers, reef species and other nearshore resources.

5. Local Voices, Longstanding Needs

During public comment, longtime boat builder Maselino Ioane described a steep decline in American Samoa's alia fishing fleet — from more than 20 active boats to just three — and pointed to longstanding infrastructure needs, including a non-functioning navigation light at Breakers Point and an underused fish market. Fono Representative and Marine Resource House Committee Chairman Sua Alexander Jennings underscored American Samoa's unique legal relationship with the United States and the role of village and territorial governance in protecting the environment and culture.



Community members rally in support of continued protections for Muliaava (Rose Atoll). (Photo: Puipui Measina a Amerika Samoa)

What Manu'a Told the Council — And What Happens Next



Rose Atoll (Photo: Alphina Liusamoa)

Two days before a presidential proclamation reopened part of the waters around Rose Atoll to commercial fishing, Manu'a residents stood before the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council and said, in effect: not like this.

What Manu'a Told the Council

During the 207th meeting's public comment period, Manu'a village leaders — including Motusa Tuileama Nua, chairman of the group Puipui Measina — told the Council that opening waters near Manu'a to expanded commercial fishing would be a “deep betrayal” of the community, and several other Manu'a representatives echoed that opposition. Speakers also raised concerns about proposed deep-sea mining nearby, questioning who would be responsible for enforcement once mining activity began. Sua Alexander Jennings, Fono Representative and Marine Resource House Committee Chairman, underscored American Samoa's unique legal relationship with the United States and the role of village and territorial governance in protecting the environment and

culture. Council leadership acknowledged the concerns and said addressing foreign fishing activity in American Samoa's waters remains a priority.

What Happens Next

On June 11, President Trump signed a proclamation, “Restoring American Commercial Fishing in the Pacific,” reopening waters between 12 and 50 nautical miles around Rose Atoll to commercial fishing. Waters within 12 nautical miles of the atoll remain closed, and vessels fishing the reopened area remain subject to the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Executive Director Kitty Simonds told the Council the change means fishery management authority for these waters is returning to the regional council process, and that a new fishery management plan will need to be developed for Manu'a.

Governor Pula'ali'i Nikolao Pula welcomed the proclamation, saying earlier restrictions had pushed the territory's longline fleet into international waters and driven up fuel costs and

voyage times. Congresswoman Uifa'atali Amata Radewagen welcomed the broader proclamation but said Rose Atoll should have remained the exception, out of respect for the cultural rights of the people of Manu'a: "With our heads we can welcome good news for our economy, while our hearts treasure Rose Atoll and stand with our people in Manu'a." Even so, she said, "I respect the fisheries council process that Congress put in place... I do not have a vote on the council, and though I am in disagreement on this one point, I respect the process and their expertise."



*Congresswoman Uifa'atali Amata at the White House for the April 2025 proclamation restoring fishing access.
(Photo: Office of Congresswoman Amata)*

Where the AP Fits

Since the proclamation removed the monument fishing restriction beyond 12 nautical miles, the coming months will hinge on local input, as a new fishery management plan for Manu'a waters takes shape. The Advisory Panel is the standing local forum for that input — Manu'a and Tutuila fishermen are encouraged to raise their concerns at the next AP meeting.



GET INVOLVED IN OUR COUNCIL PROCESS

ONE OF THE BEST WAYS to understand your engagement options is to TALK TO PEOPLE - introduce yourself to members of the Council, its staff or advisory bodies and ASK QUESTIONS.

www.wpcouncil.org

Honoring Kitty Simonds: A Sua Fa'atamali'i at the 207th Meeting



Council members with Chair Nathan Ilaoa, Executive Director Seuta'atia Kitty Simonds and Gov. Pula'ali'i Nikolao Pula at the 207th Council Meeting at the Tauese P.F. Sunia Ocean Center in Utulei. (Photo: Nathan Ilaoa)

The Council opened its 207th meeting in American Samoa on June 9 with a traditional 'ava ceremony and a formal Sua Fa'atamali'i honoring Executive Director Kitty Simonds, who has led the Council since 1983 and holds the Samoan chiefly title Seuta'atia, bestowed by the family of then-Chairman Lauvao Stephen Haleck of Aunu'u. Chiefs from Aunu'u, where the title originates, presented traditional gifts — including a fine mat and a whole pig roasted in a traditional earth oven (umu) — and the ceremony closed with a tauluga performed in her honor.

"You have spent your career making sure that small places are not forgotten in large conversations," Pula told her. "That is a rare and lasting gift, and this territory is better for it."



Executive Director Seuta'atia Kitty Simonds and Gov. Pula'ali'i Nikolao Pula. (Photo: Felix Penalosa)

American Samoa Highlights Tuna Priorities at Wellington Fisheries Meetings

by DMWR Staff



Director Ilaoa and Dr. Domingo Ochavillo representing American Samoa at the Wellington fisheries meetings. (Photo: Nate Ilaoa)

American Samoa participated in two major regional fisheries meetings in Wellington, New Zealand in June: the U.S. Tuna Treaty Consultation Meeting and the First South Pacific Albacore Allocation Workshop. Both meetings were important for American Samoa because they focused on the future of the Territory's tuna economy, including the cannery, port, fishing fleet, local businesses, workers, and families who depend on fisheries.

U.S. Tuna Treaty Consultation

American Samoa joined the United States delegation at the U.S.-Pacific Island Parties Tuna Treaty Consultation Meeting. The Treaty provides access for the U.S.-flagged purse seine fleet to fish in the waters of Pacific Island Parties and remains one of the most important regional fisheries agreements in the Pacific. During the meeting, the United States delegation made clear that the continued success of the Treaty depends on both a viable U.S.-flagged purse seine fleet and a viable American Samoa tuna industry. U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary Dr. Ruth Perry, American Tunaboat Association Executive Director Bill Gibbons-Fly, State Department representative Rachel Ryan, and DMWR Director Nathan Ilaoa all

emphasized that the U.S. fleet and American Samoa's tuna industry are directly connected. The purse seine fleet depends on American Samoa's port, cannery, services, and processing capacity, while American Samoa depends on the fleet to support jobs, exports, shipping, local businesses, and the broader economy. "The U.S.-flag purse seine fleet and the American Samoa tuna industry need each other to survive," Director Ilaoa said. "When the fleet is healthy, fish move through our port, our cannery is supported, and Samoan families feel the benefits. When the fleet struggles, American Samoa feels it too."

The U.S. delegation also announced that American Samoa will host the next U.S. Tuna Treaty Consultation Meeting in Pago Pago in March 2027.

This will be the first time American Samoa has hosted this high-level consultation. Hosting the next meeting will give Pacific Island Parties, the United States, and regional partners the opportunity to see firsthand how regional tuna policy connects to American Samoa's cannery, port, fishing industry, workforce, and community.



Photo Source: American Samoa Government - PR001-06242026

South Pacific Albacore Allocation Workshop

American Samoa also participated in the First South Pacific Albacore Allocation Workshop. This workshop focused on how future catch limits for South Pacific albacore may be allocated among WCPFC members and participating territories. This issue is especially important for American Samoa because the Territory's domestic longline fleet targets South Pacific albacore and has faced serious economic hardship for many years. Declining catch rates, oversupply, market pressure, fuel costs, and reduced fleet activity have all placed pressure on local longline fishing families. American Samoa emphasized that future allocation should not be based only on recent catch history. A recent-years-only formula would lock in the damage already caused by years of

economic hardship and would fail to recognize American Samoa's long-term participation, demonstrated capacity, and dependence on the fishery.

Dr. Domingo Ochavillo, DMWR Chief Fisheries Biologist, said the science and management discussions must be connected to the real conditions facing local fishermen. "South Pacific albacore is not just a regional management issue for American Samoa," Dr. Ochavillo said. "It is tied directly to our local longline fleet, our fishing families, our port, and our tuna economy. Any fair allocation system should recognize long-term participation and the economic hardship our fleet has faced, not only recent catch levels during difficult years."

American Samoa supported the general direction of the Forum Fisheries Agency proposal for a 75 percent EEZ, and 25 percent high seas split for South Pacific albacore. A strong EEZ share recognizes the rights, dependence, and development needs of coastal States and Participating Territories, consistent with Articles 10 and 30 of the WCPFC Convention. At the same time, American Samoa stressed the need for practical safeguards, including a fair internal allocation formula, a long reference period,

transferability, recognition of Territory needs, and protection against recent-catch-only outcomes.

American Samoa also supported language making clear that the South Pacific albacore framework should remain specific to this stock and should not automatically create precedent for future allocation discussions on tropical tuna, including bigeye, yellowfin, and skipjack. This is important because other U.S. fisheries, including the Hawaii longline fleet, have separate interests tied to tropical tuna management.

Why This Matters for American Samoa

For American Samoa, these meetings were not just policy discussions. They were about the future of the Territory's tuna economy. The Treaty consultation highlighted the importance of keeping both the U.S.-flagged purse seine fleet and American Samoa's tuna industry viable. The South Pacific albacore workshop focused on protecting the future of the local longline fleet and ensuring that allocation decisions do not punish American Samoa for recent hardship. Together, the meetings reinforced one central point: American Samoa must continue to have a strong voice in regional tuna management because decisions made at these tables directly affect local jobs, fishing families, the cannery, port activity, food security, and the Territory's long-term economic stability. American Samoa will continue working with the United States, Pacific Island partners, FFA members, WCPFC members, and the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council to support sustainable tuna fisheries, fair treatment for island economies, and a viable future for the Territory's fishing communities.



Aerial view of the canneries. (Photo: Joe Hamby)

Governor Re-establishes the American Samoa Fisheries Task Force

by DMWR Staff

The American Samoa Fisheries Task Force has moved quickly from establishment to active work on some of the most important fisheries and tuna-industry issues facing the Territory.

Governor Pula'ali'i Nikolao Pula re-established the Task Force through Executive Order No. 003-26 on June 8, 2026, creating an advisory body charged with developing coordinated recommendations to the Governor on fisheries development, economic sustainability, marine resource access, regulatory coordination, commercial and small-boat fisheries, federal fisheries policy, regional management, international tuna negotiations, and fisheries-related legislative and regulatory proposals. General Memorandum No. 116-26, issued July 6, appointed the members who now serve in the Task Force.

The Task Force brings together government, fisheries science, commercial fishing, seafood processing, small-boat fishing, sport fishing, and community perspectives. Director Nathan Ilaoa serves as Chair, with Edgar Feliciano representing the American Samoa longline sector; Joe Hamby representing the U.S.-flagged purse seine sector; Keith Ah Soon representing small-boat commercial fishing; Matthew Hall representing tuna processing; Brett Butler representing the Governor's Office; Taotasi Archie Soliai representing the community; Stuart Chikami representing longline and purse seine interests; Taulapapa William Sword representing sport fishing; and Dr. Domingo Ochavillo representing fisheries science and DMWR.

First Meeting Sets the Work in Motion

The Task Force held its first meeting on July 30, 2026. Nine members participated, and the meeting focused immediately on practical issues rather than simply organizational matters. Members examined fuel and operating costs across the longline, purse seine, processing, and small-boat sectors; South Pacific albacore

allocation and preparations for the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission; federal fishing access around Rose Atoll; development of the Task Force's required 90-day strategic framework; foreign-vessel bycatch entering the local market; and longer-term small-boat, workforce, and fisheries-development needs.

Several workstreams came directly out of that first meeting. Members agreed to develop fuel and operating-cost recommendations, supported preparation of a South Pacific albacore position based on a long historical reference period and coordination with Pacific Island positions where they align with American Samoa's interests, called for further work on the Large Vessel Prohibited Area and Rose Atoll access, and began organizing the 90-day framework around economic and market analysis, regional and federal engagement, regulatory and policy coordination, fisheries development, and community and industry outreach.

The meeting also established an important operating safeguard. Because the Task Force includes both buyers and sellers of fish, members agreed that confidential fish prices, commercial supply arrangements, private contracts, and proprietary operating costs would not be discussed by the body.

From Discussion to Federal Engagement

The Task Force has already begun translating those priorities into action. On August 7, the Task Force formally supported H.R. 8904, legislation introduced by Congresswoman Uifa'atali Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen addressing the regulation of fishing in Marine National Monuments. The Task Force's letter emphasized that fisheries management in these areas should proceed through the Magnuson-Stevens Act framework while maintaining other applicable conservation, protected species, monitoring, and enforcement requirements.

The Task Force has also begun assembling a broader federal advocacy package rather than approaching each challenge separately. Current work includes South Pacific albacore and WCPFC policy, implementation of restored federal fishing access, Section 30A and tuna-industry competitiveness, examination of trade conditions affecting U.S.-based tuna processing, operating and energy costs, U.S.-flag tuna supply, and the long-term viability of American Samoa's fishing and processing system.

This approach reflects one of the central reasons the Task Force was re-established. American Samoa's fisheries cannot be viewed as isolated sectors. The local longline fleet, U.S.-flag purse seine vessels, StarKist Samoa, Pago Pago Harbor, small-boat and alia fishermen, fuel and transportation systems, fisheries infrastructure, and federal and international policy all affect one another.



American Samoa's longline fleet targets South Pacific albacore, a key focus of the Fisheries Task Force as the Territory prepares for regional management and allocation discussions.

South Pacific Albacore Remains a Major Priority

South Pacific albacore is particularly important because it is the principal target of the American Samoa longline fishery. As WCPFC members continue work on future allocation and management arrangements, the Task Force is helping develop a coordinated territorial position

focused on recognizing American Samoa's historical participation, economic dependence on tuna, and need for sufficient fishing opportunity to maintain and rebuild its domestic fleet.

The issue is larger than a single allocation number. Decisions made at WCPFC can affect the viability of American Samoa vessels, the supply of locally caught albacore to Pago Pago, and the Territory's long-term position in international tuna management. The Task Force therefore provides a forum for fisheries science, industry experience, territorial policy, and the interests of fishing communities to be considered together before American Samoa enters regional and international discussions.

Local and Small-Boat Fisheries Are Part of the Same Agenda

The Task Force is also looking beyond the industrial tuna sector. Current priorities include alia and small-vessel development, fishing infrastructure, fuel access, ice and cold storage, boat ramps and docks, fish aggregating devices, market access, workforce training, and pathways for younger American Samoans to enter fishing careers. Particular attention is being given to the additional fuel, transportation, infrastructure, and market-access burdens faced by fishermen in Manu'a.

That balance is important. The Task Force was not created only to address international tuna negotiations or federal regulation. Its mandate also includes the fishermen and communities whose activities occur much closer to shore and whose needs are tied directly to food security, cultural practice, local markets, and access to the ocean.

A Public Window into the Task Force

The Task Force now has a dedicated public webpage where residents, fishermen, industry participants, policymakers, and other interested parties can learn about its membership, priorities, meetings, documents, and ongoing work. Visit the American Samoa Fisheries Task Force website at fisheries.as.gov.

The website is intended to provide a continuing public record as the Task Force's work develops, including information on current priorities, meeting materials and summaries, official documents, policy positions, and opportunities for the fishing community to stay informed.

The Next Milestone

The immediate deadline is the initial strategic framework required by the Executive Order. The 90-day period began with the first meeting on July 30. The framework is being developed to identify the Territory's principal fisheries priorities, recommended actions, responsible parties, and issues requiring longer-term work.

The Task Force is still early in its work, but it has already moved beyond simply establishing another advisory body. Its first weeks have included a substantive first meeting, development of coordinated fisheries priorities, congressional engagement, work on WCPFC and South Pacific albacore strategy, federal fishing-access issues, economic and industry concerns, and creation of a public platform for its work.

The objective remains straightforward: when major fisheries decisions affecting American Samoa are made in Pago Pago, Honolulu, Washington, or international forums across the Pacific, the Territory should approach them with a coordinated position that reflects its fishermen, communities, science, economy, and long-term interests.



An American Samoa longline vessel operates out of Pago Pago. South Pacific albacore and the long-term viability of the domestic fleet are major priorities for the Fisheries Task Force. (Photo: WPRFMC)

DMWR Point-Based System Will Support Fair Access and Full Census Fishery Data

by DMWR Staff

The American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources is preparing to implement a new point-based prioritization system for small-boat fishermen. The system is designed to make the distribution of limited fisheries support more transparent while helping DMWR transition toward full census boat-based data collection. Under the new system, fishermen can earn points for verified fishing participation, complete catch and effort reporting, cooperation with DMWR data collection, attendance at fisheries meetings and trainings, tournament participation, community outreach, and maintaining good standing. When limited support becomes available, such as fishing gear, safety equipment, fuel assistance, training opportunities, or participation in special programs, DMWR may use point totals to help establish a priority list among eligible fishermen.



DMWR Director Ilaoa and local bottomfish alia fishermen. (Photo: Nate Ilaoa)

"The goal is better data, fairer access to support, and a system that works for the people who are actually out fishing," Director Ilaoa said.

The point system will not guarantee that a fisherman receives a benefit. Eligibility requirements, available funding, program rules, and the type of assistance being offered will still apply. Points will provide DMWR with a consistent and documented way to prioritize applicants when demand is greater than the available resources.

How the system will work

Fishermen may receive points for activities such as participating in a verified fishing trip; providing complete catch and effort information; self-catch reporting (when it becomes available); providing vessel arrival notification when required; attending approved fisheries trainings, workshops,

meetings, and public hearings; participating in DMWR-recognized tournaments; supporting youth and community fishing activities; and maintaining regulatory compliance.

Points will reward participation, reporting, and cooperation. They will not be based on the number or weight of fish caught. This is important because DMWR does not want the system to encourage additional harvest simply for the purpose of earning points. Ordinary fishing-trip points will also have a quarterly limit. Fishermen should continue reporting all trips, including trips above the point cap, because those reports remain important to understanding the fishery. The cap is intended to prevent unusually short or artificial trips from being made only to increase point totals.

Points will follow the fisherman, not only the boat

The system recognizes that many licensed fishermen do not own a vessel. Crew members, spearfishers, and other fishermen may fish aboard someone else's alia or rotate among different boats. Each verified participating fisherman may receive an individual point entry, including crew members who do not own the vessel. For group trips, DMWR will connect each fisherman's point entry to the same vessel and trip record. The vessel owner or operator will remain responsible for vessel-related requirements such as registration, safe operation, arrival notification, and fuel-benefit reconciliation. A vessel owner will not receive extra points simply for carrying additional fishermen, and a person who was aboard but did not participate in fishing will not receive trip points. This approach allows fishermen to maintain their own point history even when they fish from different vessels.

Strengthening relationships and improving data

The point system is being developed to run alongside DMWR's transition to full census boat-based data collection. Under the traditional boat-based creel survey, DMWR staff sampled a portion of fishing trips and used those interviews

and observations to estimate total catch and fishing effort. Under a full census approach, the goal is to collect information from every fishing trip, or as close to every trip as operationally possible. This should provide a more complete picture of fishing activity, catch, effort, fishing methods, species composition, and changes in the fishery over time. For DMWR's boat-based staff, the success of full census reporting will depend not only on forms and technology, but also on strong working relationships with fishermen.

"As a creel data collector, building relationships with our fishermen is very key," Boat-Based Supervisor Fernan Asalele said.



Alia fishermen take part in a DMWR community meeting to discuss the Department's fisheries programs and priorities. (Photo: Nate Ilaoa)

"With this point system, we can enhance our interactions and foster trust, paving the way for more accurate data collection and ultimately benefiting our local fishing community as a whole. By working together, we can promote sustainable practices and safeguard the livelihoods tied to our waters."

The point system is intended to support those relationships by recognizing fishermen who consistently report trips, cooperate with DMWR staff, and provide complete information. Better communication and stronger trust can improve the quality of the data while making the reporting process more practical for fishermen and staff.

A transparent process

“This is about creating a transparent process,” Chief Fisheries Biologist Dr. Domingo Ochavillo said. “Fishermen should be able to see that reporting their trips, working with our staff, and staying involved all count for something when support opportunities come up.”

Better fishery information can help DMWR explain the importance of American Samoa’s small-boat fisheries, support requests for equipment and infrastructure, improve catch and effort estimates, and better represent local fishing interests in territorial and federal management discussions. The point system gives fishermen an additional reason to stay involved in that process. Consistent reporting and cooperation will help improve the information available to DMWR while also being recognized when limited support opportunities become available.

Protecting the scientific data

The point ledger will remain separate from the scientific catch-and-effort database. One fishing trip may generate separate point entries for several participating fishermen, but the catch and effort from that trip will not be counted several times in the scientific dataset. The vessel trip will remain the main record for catch, effort, and catch-per-unit-effort analysis, while the individual fisherman will be the main record for points and

benefit prioritization. DMWR staff will review entries before points are approved. Incomplete or unusual records may be flagged for follow-up. A flagged record does not automatically mean that a fisherman did something wrong. It means staff may need additional information before approving points or using the record for scientific purposes.

A clearer and more accountable system

Fishermen will be able to request a summary of their point record. Corrections will be documented through adjustment entries rather than deleting the original transaction, creating a clear record of how point totals were calculated. When a specific benefit becomes available, DMWR will issue a notice explaining the eligibility requirements, point review period, required documentation, and how the priority list will be used. DMWR will review the system after implementation and make adjustments where needed. Feedback from fishermen, boat-based staff, and the American Samoa Advisory Panel will be important in keeping the process practical, fair, and appropriate for the local fishing community. The overall purpose is simple: improve fishery information, strengthen trust between fishermen and DMWR, recognize those who participate and cooperate, and create a fairer way to distribute limited support.



Alia boat owners and fishers receive incentives from DMWR in recognition of their participation in the Department's data collection and reporting efforts. (Photo: Nate Ilaoa)

3rd Pago Pago Open Fishing Tournament



Grand prize winner Lafaele Ioka with the tournament's heaviest fish caught, a 26.1-pound masimasi (mahimahi). (Photo: Vincent Tofilau)

Ahead of the 207th Council meeting, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council and the American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources hosted the 3rd Pago Pago Open Fishing Tournament in support of ongoing bottomfish data collection. The tournament coincided with data collection work being carried out in local waters by NOAA's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, giving anglers a chance to combine a day of fishing with a real contribution to fisheries science.

Nine boats registered for the tournament, but eight ultimately took part, the majority of them from American Samoa's local alia fleet. A windy Saturday morning delayed the start, but that didn't stop the eager fishermen from heading out from Malaloa Marina on June 6. Sousou o le Vasa took the tournament's grand prize, landing the heaviest fish overall — a 26.1-pound mahimahi. Tagiilima won the bottomfish division with 110.1 pounds landed, followed by Keejana with 41.33 pounds. M&M Express caught the largest single bottomfish, a 13.3-pound onaga. In the pelagic division, Avaiki placed first with 37.79 pounds, followed by H&H Express with 36.6 pounds. Mumua and Tava'e Ula received consolation prizes.

Many of the boats that competed are part of American Samoa's local alia fleet, the small, locally built vessels that make up much of the territory's inshore fishing industry. Bottomfishing was a centerpiece of the competition, with anglers targeting six locally managed species — palu-malau, palu-loa, palu-ula, palu-sina, palu-enaena and asoama — a reminder of how central bottomfishing remains to the territory's alia

fishermen, and to the data collection effort the tournament was designed to support.

The tournament also received support from SOPAC Distributors, American Samoa Shipyard Services Authority, POP Fishing & Marine, StarKist Samoa, Applied Technology Solutions, the Pacific Islands Fisheries Group, Industrial Gases, Tool Shop and Tropik Traders.



Team Tagiilima with Council staff at the 3rd Pago Pago Open Fishing Tournament award ceremony (Photo: Felix Penalosa)

American Samoa Shipyard: A Vital Part of the Territory's Tuna Economy



Whether you call it the American Samoa Shipyard Services Authority or the Ronald Reagan Shipyard Services Authority, the “Shipyard” is a conspicuous and vital part of the Territory’s tuna dependent economy. Not only do the fishing boats depend on the Shipyard for periodic maintenance and emergency repairs, but so do the tug boats and cargo/ferry boats upon which we depend.

The Shipyard is owned by the American Samoa Government. It is managed by CEO Carlos Sanchez (“Carlos”) who reports to a board of seven directors appointed by Governor Pula’ali’i Nikolao Pula.

Carlos was appointed as CEO and Chairman of the Board by former Governor Lemanu Peleti Mauga in February 2021. At that time the Shipyard had nine employees with only \$10,000 in the bank. The drydock’s cradle was adrift and the rails upon which the cradle is supposed to sit were badly

misaligned. Tools, spare parts, paint and other supplies had gone missing. Basically, the Shipyard was broken and inoperable. The tugboat Sialele was badly in need of drydocking; so were many other boats. What to do?

Governor Lemanu received a bid of \$5.0 million from a foreign company to put the Shipyard back in operation. The Governor asked Carlos’s opinion. Carlos replied, “If I can drydock the Sialele within 15 days, will you invest \$1.0m in the Shipyard?” The Governor accepted the proposal, and Sanchez drydocked the Sialele on time and has been CEO of the Shipyard ever since.

Keeping the Shipyard working is very challenging. The demand for drydocking services is limited to the boats that are based in Pago Pago. However, the bigger boats, e.g. tuna purse seiners, are prohibited by their insurance coverage from using the Shipyard because it is not certified. Cost of certification will be about \$500,000.00 and the

Shipyards doesn't have funding for this important expense.

Without certification and the revenue from the additional drydocking work, the Shipyards has been able to survive thanks to US Government grants, e.g., \$2.2 million from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, and diversification of its customer base.

Using the grant money to buy tools, and equipment, the Shipyards has been able to grow its business and workforce to 50 employees. The key then becomes keeping these workers busy and paid. The bi-weekly payroll of about \$55,000 is a heavy burden for CEO Carlos Sanchez. It keeps him up at night thinking what jobs the shipyard can do to keep the skilled workforce fully occupied and generating revenue for the Shipyards.

Carlo's answer was to diversify the Shipyards' customer base and to bid on projects that went beyond the core business of ship maintenance and repair. That's why we're seeing the Shipyards cleaning ASPA tanks, repairing and replacing damaged communications towers, repairing the main dock's fenders, maintaining equipment at the airport, and painting warehouses.

When the Shipyards workers don't have any revenue generating work to do, they are

reclaiming and reinforcing the Shipyards' waterfront property including the eroding area in front of the ASPA power plant. So far, the Shipyards has reclaimed over three acres of waterfront land.

During these past five years of growth and development the Shipyards has become an important part of the larger American Samoa community by pulling from the harbor derelict and sunken wrecks without compensation. In cooperation with the American Samoa Community College to provide practical training in sandblasting, welding, diving and other skills. And, thanks to the fact that Carlos is an Agronomist, the Shipyards has established itself as a free source of plants like sasalapa (soursop), avocado, pineapple, mango, and tomatoes. The Shipyards donated about 1,200 plants last Christmas and 1,500 were donated in celebration of the Fourth of July.

The Shipyards needs financial support just as the fishing industry needs the services of the Shipyards. Financial support is especially needed for certification of the Shipyards' drydock. Certification will enable the Shipyards to provide drydocking services to the purse seiners, US Coast Guard cutters and others. It's a matter of national security.



Shipyards Director Carlos Sanchez with shipyard workers following completion of the shipyard rehabilitation project. (Photo: Shipyards)

STAY CONNECTED

How to Get Involved & What's Coming Up

What's Before the AP Right Now

Rose Atoll / Manu'a fishery management measures — the Council and NOAA are still working through what additional regulatory changes or clarification may be needed. See "What Manu'a Told the Council", Page 4 in this issue.

DMWR's new point-based prioritization system — DMWR wants fishermen's feedback as it rolls out. See the DMWR feature in this issue.

The Governor's Fisheries Task Force — standing up its committees and drafts its first strategic framework. Panel members are well placed to inform that work. See the Task Force story in this issue.

Have a view on any of these? Bring it to the next AP meeting or contact your Island Coordinator below.

What's Coming Up?

American Samoa FEP AP Meeting

Tue, Sept 1, 2026, 6–8pm — Tedi of Samoa, Fagatogo Village

Fishing Industry Advisory Committee (FIAC)

Wed, Sept 2, 2026 — Council Office, Honolulu (+ Webex)

161st Scientific & Statistical Committee (SSC)

Sept 8–10, 2026 — Council Office, Honolulu (+ Webex)

208th Council Meeting

Sept 15–17, 2026 — Web conference, with host sites in Honolulu, American Samoa, Guam and Saipan

American Samoa Advisory Panel Meeting

December 1, 2026 — Tedi of Samoa, Fagatogo Village (Tentative)

162nd Scientific & Statistical Committee

Dember 8-10, 2026 — Virtual (Tentative)

209th Council Meeting

December 14-16, 2026 — Honolulu (Tentative)

How to Get Involved

Community participation is essential to ensuring that fisheries management reflects the needs and values of American Samoa. There are several ways to stay informed and be part of the process:

Follow the American Samoa Advisory Panel (AS AP) Facebook Page

www.facebook.com/684Fisheries

Attend Public Meetings & Workshops

Join Advisory Panel meetings, community consultations, and Council meetings to share your input and hear directly from decision-makers.

Contact Your Local Council Coordinator

Felix Penalosa

American Samoa Island Coordinator, WPRFMC

Office: (684) 633-0547

Email: felix.penalosa@wpcouncil.org

Visit the Council Website

www.wpcouncil.org

Fa'afetai tele lava!