

ORIGINAL : ENGLISH

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

TWENTY-FIFTH REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES (Noumea, New Caledonia 14–18 March 1994)

COUNTRY STATEMENT

AMERICAN SAMOA

1. Status of Domestic Fisheries in 1993

Domestic fisheries in American Samoa include artisanal pelagic and bottomfish fisheries, subsistence fisheries, and sport tournament fisheries.

1.1 Artisanal pelagic and bottomfish fisheries.

Artisanal troll catches of pelagic fish dropped from 112,400 lb in 1992 to 66,000 lb in 1993, resulting from a 28% reduction in effort and a reduced CPUE, particularly for skipjack tuna. Catches, consisting primarily of skipjack and yellowfin tuna, were landed by 40 domestic boats. The catch was worth about \$92,000 at an average price of \$1.50/lb for tunas and \$2.00/lb for other pelagic species.

Suitable habitat for bottomfish is very limited in American Samoa because the island slopes steeply into deep water and there are few seamounts in the Territory. Catches of bottomfish amounted to 16,785 lb in 1993. Principal species caught were: gray jobfish, emperors, blue lined snapper, onaga and ehu. Total value was \$29,000 at an average price of \$1.81/lb for bottomfish. CPUE was 12 lb/hr for the 23 boats landing bottomfish in 1993.

1.2. Tournament fisheries.

There were only 2 tournaments in 1993, with landings of 11,500 lb, consisting of yellowfin tuna, skipjack tuna, wahoo, mahimahi, marlin, sailfish, and others.

1.3. Shoreline subsistence fishery.

The reeftop and adjacent shallow waters of American Samoa are inhabited by a diverse array of fish and shellfish species that are harvested by local residents on almost a daily basis throughout the year. Although this fishery accounts for 70% of fish taken in all domestic fisheries, it is in apparent decline. Catches have dropped in the 3 years for which data are available: 660,000 lb (1979), 440,000 lb (1991), 334,500 lb (1992). Catches in 1993 are not yet available.

2. Distant-water Commercial Tuna Fisheries.

American Samoa is homeport to a distant-water fleet of large commercial vessels that deliver tuna to the canneries on Tutuila Island. These vessels fish beyond American Samoa's EEZ in the central and western South Pacific Ocean. The fleet consists of (a) US purse seiners that fish for skipjack and yellowfin tuna, (b) US trollers that fish for albacore, and (c) foreign longliners that fish for albacore, yellowfin tuna, and bigeye tuna. In addition, transshipments of tuna are delivered to American Samoa by freezer vessels. Landings have averaged 115,000 short tons during the past 5 years, consisting of skipjack tuna (61%), yellowfin tuna (20%), and albacore (15%). The catch by gear type was: purse seine (55%), longline (13%), and troll (1%). The remainder (30%) was delivered by freezer vessels.

3. Other developments

a. Longline test fishery.

The objective of this ongoing project is to collect biological and economic data needed to assess the potential of a domestic longline fishery in American Samoa's EEZ. SPC has greatly aided this endeavor by providing Masterfisherman Gerry Russo to assist the project in recent months. Catch rates in February 1994 were modest (1.4 marketable fish per 100 hooks) as might be expected when fishing in an exploratory manner.

b. Harbor toxicity.

A Phase-2 sampling program revealed that pollution in Pago Pago Harbor is more widespread than previously thought. While organochlorines are limited to the harbor area, elevated concentrations of lead, arsenic, and mercury in fish and shellfish were found at several sites around Tutuila Island. New health advisories for residents are in preparation.

c. Turtle migrations.

Sea turtle populations are declining throughout the South Pacific (SPREP 1993). To gather information about dwindling turtle stocks in American Samoa, 3 green turtles were fitted with satellite transmitters. All 3 travelled from their nesting grounds at Rose Atoll to Fiji, thereby highlighting the need for the islands to coordinate their turtle conservation efforts. To promote public awareness, a contest was held to guess where the 3 turtles would migrate. Over 300 entries from the public and schools were received.

d. Marine conservation areas.

Several nearshore sites around Tutuila and the Manu'a Islands received protected status in 1993. A National Park on Tutuila Islands became a reality in 1993. On Ofu Island, a 90-acre coral reef park was established by the Territory.

e. New building for DMWR.

DMWR's new two-story cement office building was completed in 1993. It is much appreciated.
