

# American Samoa Archipelago

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## *201<sup>st</sup> Council Meeting Motu Lipoti*

This report provides an update on current issues and events related to fisheries in American Samoa.

### **The 2024 American Samoan Elections: A Summary**

The 2024 American Samoa elections saw both change and continuity, with a new gubernatorial team taking office while the incumbent Congresswoman was re-elected. The general election for governor of American Samoa took place on November 6, 2024. No candidate secured more than 50% of the votes, resulting in a runoff election on November 19, 2024.

The team of Pulaalii Nikolao Pula and Pulu Ae Ae Jr. ultimately emerged victorious in the runoff election, defeating the incumbent team of Governor Lemanu Peleti Mauga and Lt. Governor Laapui Talauega Eleasalo Ale. This victory signifies a desire for change among the electorate, with Pula and Pulu campaigning on a platform of "Honest Governance leading to Peace and Prosperity".

A significant factor in the run-off election outcome was the endorsement of Vaitautolu Talia Iaulualo and Maefau Dr. Mary Taufetee, who ran third in the general election. Their public support for the Pula & Pulu team emphasized a shared commitment to change and governance reform. This alliance consolidated the majority of voters who sought new leadership.

The House of Representatives elections witnessed a combination of returning and new faces. Seventeen incumbent representatives were re-elected, while four lost their seats. Notably, the new House of Representatives now includes two women, Vaasa Simanu and Trude Ledoux Sunia, marking a step towards increased female representation in the legislature.

<b><i>Candidate Team</i></b>	<b><i>General Election Votes (%)</i></b>	<b><i>Run-Off Election Votes</i></b>
Pulaalii Nikolao Pula & Pulu Ae Ae Jr.	4,284 (42.4%)	5,846 (59.8%)
Lemanu Peleti Mauga & Laapui Talauega Eleasalo Ale	3,660 (36.2%)	3,925 (40.2%)
Vaitautolu Talia Iaulualo & Maefau Dr. Mary Taufetee	2,169 (21.4%)	N/A

## US Congressional Delegate Election Results



The US Congressional Delegate election resulted in the re-election of incumbent Aumua Amata, who secured a commanding 74.8% of the votes. Amata's victory suggests a degree of satisfaction with her performance and a desire for experienced representation in Congress. Her statement acknowledging the new administration and emphasizing collaboration on shared priorities signals a commitment to working effectively with the incoming gubernatorial team for the benefit of American Samoa.

Candidate	Votes	Percentage
Uifa'atali Amata (re-elected)	7,394	74.8%
Luisa Kuaea	1,840	18.6%
Fualaa Rosie Lancaster	469	4.7%
Meleagi Suitonu Chapman	185	1.9%

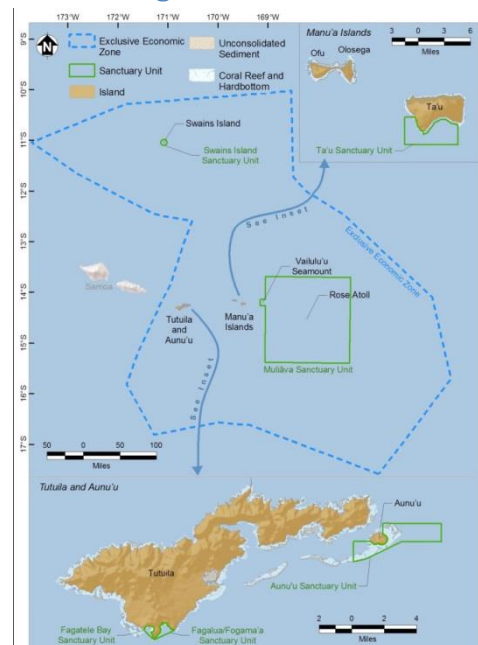
Congresswoman Uifa'atali Amata's re-election positions American Samoa to potentially gain greater influence in the 119th Congress. Notable opportunities for Amata include:

- Natural Resources Committee:** Potential for a chair or vice-ranking position on the Subcommittee on Insular and Indian Affairs, contingent on a Republican majority.
- House Foreign Affairs Indo-Pacific Subcommittee:** Retention of the Vice-Chair role, enhancing Pacific security amid growing tensions with China.
- Veterans Affairs Committee:** Likely continuation as Vice-Chair, advocating for veteran services.

Amata's legislative priorities include:

- Advancing her Pacific healthcare initiative, anchored by LBJ Hospital in American Samoa.
- Securing fishing exemptions for the local tuna fleet within the expanded Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument.
- Finalizing the South Pacific Tuna Treaty Act and renewing the 30A tax credit critical for the local cannery.
- Pushing for Coast Guard expansion to address regional security and illegal fishing concerns.
- Advocating for infrastructure development in ports, hospitals, and other key areas.

## Data Representation in Fisheries Management



An ongoing concern is the underrepresentation of American Samoa in NOAA's "Fisheries of the United States" Annual Report. This lack of inclusion prevents accurate assessments of the American Samoan fishing industry and could negatively impact the allocation of federal resources. Director of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) for American Samoa, expressed concern that the omission of the Port of Pago Pago from these reports minimizes the importance of local fisheries, both regionally and nationally.

A 1999 report by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council recognized American Samoa as the top port in the nation for both landings and value due to the presence of two canneries operating at the time. While Pago Pago was included in the 2020 report after Council members from American Samoa raised the issue with the NOAA Pacific Islands Regional Office Administrator, it has not been included in any other reports.

This lack of representation in the national fisheries reports obscures the contributions of American Samoa and perpetuates a pattern of marginalization for its community. Despite ranking third among all U.S. state and territorial jurisdictions in landings and value, behind Alaska and Massachusetts, American Samoa's fisheries remain underrepresented in federal assessments.

The 2020 report, the only one to include American Samoa, recorded 165 million pounds of commercial fish landings valued at \$93 million in 2019. In 2020, landings increased to 170 million pounds with a value of \$108 million, placing Pago Pago in 7th place for landings and 5th place for value among major U.S. ports.

Soliai stresses that accurate and fair representation is crucial given the vital role fisheries play in the territory's economy, culture, and livelihoods. He urges NOAA to ensure the Port of Pago

Pago is consistently included in future annual fisheries reports to acknowledge its contributions and uphold fairness for the people and industries dependent on this sector.

## Regional Cooperation



There has been a positive development in regional fisheries management as American Samoa and Samoa officials participated in a training program designed to strengthen the legal framework for fisheries. This training was funded by the U.S. Embassy in Samoa and organized by the Samoan Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Pacific Community, and the University of California College of Law. The training concentrated on enhancing transparency, accountability, and equity in marine resource laws. This joint initiative showcases a commitment to sustainable fisheries management and the importance of strong legal frameworks in the region.

Three officials from American Samoa attended a training session with Samoan officials to learn how to improve transparency, accountability, and equity in marine resource laws. The training was held in Samoa and was funded by a grant from the U.S. Embassy in Samoa. The training was organized by the Samoan Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) in partnership with the Pacific Community (SPC) and the University of California College of Law, San Francisco (UC Law SF).

The training covered topics such as:

- Drafting and implementing laws to protect coastal ecosystems
- Critical Samoan Laws such as the Fisheries Management Act of 2016, fisheries regulations, and community-driven village fisheries bylaws
- Gender equity, social inclusion, and human rights within coastal communities

The CEO of the Samoan Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries believes that legislation is a powerful tool for change, and it can shape behaviors, protect marine and fisheries resources, and

ensure that future generations inherit a thriving ocean. He also believes that drafting effective laws requires an understanding of fisheries, the environment, communities, and the economy.

Daniel Tarapacki, the U.S. Chargé d' Affaires, stated that the U.S. is investing in local governance and the long-term health of marine ecosystems by supporting the training. He went on to say that this training strengthened the partnership between the United States and Samoa.

### 2024 Palolo Rise

The annual palolo rise occurred in October of 2024. The Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) accurately predicted that the rise would occur on October 24th or 25th, based on the lunar calendar. The palolo rose on both Wednesday and Thursday night. Residents in Ta'u reported a heavy palolo rise, with the harvest being shared with elderly residents and families of those who did not participate in the harvest. It is a superstitious belief that selling the palolo will prevent it from returning. On Tutuila, rough seas made it difficult to catch the palolo, but some people were able to catch enough to fill 5 baggies.



### Ronald Reagan Marine Railway: Rebuilt and Ready

The Ronald Reagan Marine Railway has undergone a significant transformation over the past four years, rising from the ruins left by the 2009 tsunami to become a fully functioning shipyard.

The shipyard's slipway, initially estimated to cost between \$12 and \$15 million to repair by a U.S. contractor, was successfully restored and extended by the shipyard's own workers under the leadership of CEO Tanumaleu Carlos Sanchez. The slipway can now accommodate boats up to 300 ft in length, significantly expanding its capacity. The mechanic shop, also devastated by the tsunami, was replaced with a new building, again constructed by the shipyard workers. Similarly,



the condemned "Winch House," housing the shipyard's offices and administration, was redesigned and rebuilt by the workers, showcasing their skill and dedication.

This rebuilding effort was driven by the leadership of Governor Lemanu Peleti Mauga, who assembled a diverse board of directors to oversee the shipyard's revitalization, and CEO Sanchez, whose "can-do" attitude inspired the workforce. The shipyard also implemented an effective cross-training program, equipping employees with multiple skills, further enhancing its operational efficiency.

The shipyard's transformation has extended beyond its physical infrastructure. It has diversified its services, taking on repairs for the American Samoa Power Authority and assisting Port Administration, demonstrating its commitment to serving the broader community. Governor Lemanu expressed pride in the shipyard's accomplishments, emphasizing the capabilities of local workers and highlighting the shipyard's readiness to repair vessels for the Department of Defense. CEO Sanchez echoed this sentiment, praising the shipyard employees for their hard work and dedication.



### Research on Ciguatera Poisoning

A research project, led by NOAA EPP/MSI scholar Talofa Fe'a, focused on assessing the risk of ciguatera poisoning in American Samoa. The research was conducted with the National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa (NMSAS) and the University of Hawai'i Sea Grant's Pacific Ciguatera Network. This project highlights the importance of understanding and addressing this foodborne illness prevalent in the Pacific. The researchers conducted extensive community

engagement through interviews with fishers and community members. These interviews sought to gather firsthand experiences and knowledge about ciguatera.

## Conservation Efforts

The USDA Forest Service awarded \$10.3 million to preserve the Naumati Lowland Rainforest. This funding will allow for the creation of American Samoa's first locally managed Territorial Conservation Park. The Naumati Lowland Rainforest is the last remaining substantial stand of a tropical lowland "tava" forest and is home to rare species of flora and fauna. The conservation effort involved collaboration between local and federal partners, including the DMWR, the Governor's Office, the ASG Attorney General's Office, ASCC-Land Grant, ASEPA, the US Forest Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Nature Conservancy. Protecting this rainforest safeguards biodiversity and creates opportunities for conservation education, nature recreation, and ecotourism, potentially contributing to economic growth.

## 53rd Pacific Islands Forum

- The 53rd Pacific Islands Forum was held in Nuku'alofa, Tonga from August 26-30, 2024.
- American Samoa attended the forum as an observer.
- Leaders endorsed the membership applications of Guam and American Samoa as associate members, acknowledging that the ongoing Review of the Regional Architecture (RRA) may have implications on associate membership criteria and entitlements.

## Secretary General's Letter to Governor Lemanu

- On October 22, 2024, Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General Baron Waqa sent a letter to American Samoa Governor Lemanu Palepoi Sialega Mauga, formally confirming American Samoa's associate membership status in the Pacific Islands Forum.
- This confirmation was based on paragraphs 57 and 58 of the Forum Leaders' Communiqué from the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum.
- The Secretary General acknowledged Governor Lemanu's leadership during the application process.
- He also noted that the ongoing Review of the Regional Architecture may have implications on the criteria and entitlements of associate membership.

## AS Legislature Letter to POTUS

- On November 21, 2024, the American Samoa Legislature sent a letter to President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. expressing profound concern over the proposed expansion of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument.
- The Legislature emphasized American Samoa's heavy dependence on the tuna industry, highlighting that approximately:
  - 99% of exports are tuna-related.
  - One-third of private-sector employment (over 5,000 jobs) is directly tied to the tuna industry.
  - Two-thirds of income for ocean freight services is tied to the tuna industry.

- The Legislature argued that restricting access to fishing grounds within the U.S. EEZ would have devastating economic consequences for American Samoa.
- They also expressed concerns that the U.S. fisheries management system, specifically the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, has not effectively managed this natural resource.
- They cited the historical precedent of President Truman's 1951 transfer of administrative responsibility for American Samoa from the Secretary of the Navy to the Secretary of the Interior, emphasizing the commitment to the political, economic, and social advancement of the territory.
- The Legislature urged President Biden to prioritize the well-being of the people of American Samoa in his decision-making regarding the sanctuary expansion.
- They attached House Concurrent Resolution No. 38-22, formally expressing their opposition to the designation of a national marine sanctuary in the Pacific Remote Islands Area.
- The resolution highlights the potential negative economic impacts of fishing restrictions, including:
  - Threat to the tuna industry, American Samoa's primary economic driver.
  - Loss of approximately 5,000 jobs.
  - 40% increase in shipping and freight costs.
  - Increased electricity costs for consumers.
- The resolution states that the existing commercial fisheries in the region occur offshore in the open ocean and do not interact with or impact coral reefs, seamounts, or other nearshore ecosystems.
- It also notes that American Samoa has a relatively small, locally based fishing fleet that engages in sustainable fishing practices.

### Request for Observer Status at FFC Meetings

- On November 17, 2024, Dr. Pio Manoa, Deputy Director-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), sent a letter to Governor Lemanu P.S. Mauga confirming American Samoa's request to be an observer **at** Forum Fisheries Committee meetings.
- The letter included dates for the 2025 Annual Officials Forum Fisheries 137th Meeting (FFC137), Annual Ministerial Forum Fisheries Committee 24th Meeting (FFCMIN24), and Regional Fisheries Ministerial 6th Meeting (RFMM6) to be held in Niue.

### Buds and Suds Tournament

The Buds and Suds fishing tournament, held from November 27th to 29th, saw participation from boats representing both American Samoa and Samoa. The tournament focused on catching a variety of fish species, with anglers reeling in Barracuda, Dogtooth, Wahoo, Masimasi, Yellowfin, Sailfish, and Marlin.

The tournament organizers meticulously tracked the weight of each fish brought in by the participating boats. For instance, on November 29th, Fatu Maselino, fishing on the boat "Last Minute", caught a Barracuda weighing 29.00 pounds. Similarly, on November 28th, Sam



Fuamatu aboard the "Double Shot" landed a Wahoo weighing a remarkable 60.80 pounds. These individual catches contributed to the overall weight tallies for each boat, ultimately determining the tournament's winners.

The "Blessings" emerged as the boat with the highest total weight, boasting an impressive 474.80 pounds of fish. Other high-performing boats included the "Pure Indulgence" with 552.00 pounds, the "Amana" with 348.40 pounds, the "Double Trouble" with 231.60 pounds, and the "Free Spirit" with 276.80 pounds. The combined efforts of all participating anglers resulted in a grand total of 3521.20 pounds of fish caught throughout the tournament.

The competition between American Samoa and Samoa added another layer of excitement to the tournament. While Samoa boasted a higher average catch per boat, with their 8 boats averaging 215.13 pounds, American Samoa ultimately secured the coveted Perpetual Trophy. This victory was attributed to their larger fleet of 11 boats, which contributed to a higher overall catch, averaging 163.65 pounds per boat. The Perpetual Trophy, awarded to the country with the highest average catch per boat, signifies the competitive spirit and national pride associated with the Buds and Suds tournament.

<b>BOAT</b>	<b>WEIGHT</b>
<b>1 PURE INDULGENCE</b>	<b>552.00</b>
<b>2 BLESSINGS</b>	<b>474.80</b>
<b>3 AMANA</b>	<b>348.40</b>
4 FREE SPIRIT	276.80
5 BELLA'S PRIDE	239.40
6 DBL TROUBLE	231.60
7 DBL SHOT	208.20
8 ANITA PIER	202.80
9 FU'A II	200.20
10 TAVA'E ULA	191.20
11 VAIMALU	135.00
12 LAST MINUTE	125.60
13 KEEJANA	115.60
14 BLACK PEARL	75.20
15 MUMUA	53.80
16 DEVORAH	46.00
17 SHIRLEY B	29.00
18 NOELANI	15.60
<b>TOTAL COMBINED WEIGHT:</b>	<b>3,521.20</b>

<b>Date</b>	<b>Species</b>	<b>Weight</b>	<b>Angler</b>	<b>Captain</b>	<b>Boat</b>
<b>27-Nov</b>	Misc. Baracuda	24.00	Mike Levi	Vaughan Simpson	Fu'a II

<b>29-Nov</b>	Misc. Baracuda	29.00	Fatu	Maselino Ioane	Last Minute
<b>29-Nov</b>	Misc. Baracuda	45.60	Telesia	Roy Lee	Black Pearl
<b>27-Nov</b>	Dogtooth	25.00	Dustin Snow	Brian Peck	Tava'e Ula
<b>28-Nov</b>	Dogtooth	27.40	Aaron Pu'e	Manny	Devorah
<b>29-Nov</b>	Dogtooth	29.60	Williams	Roy Lee	Black Pearl
<b>28-Nov</b>	Wahoo	23.20	Sala McMoore	Peter Reid	Vaimalu
<b>27-Nov</b>	Wahoo	32.20	Pafuti Tupua	Chris Banse	Double Trouble
<b>28-Nov</b>	Wahoo	60.80	Sam Fuamatu	Andy Wearing	Double Shot
<b>29-Nov</b>	Masimasi	29.00	Sala Mcquire	Bruce Leिताua	Shirley B
<b>29-Nov</b>	Masimasi	31.40	Jerome Jerome	Will Sword	Mumua
<b>27-Nov</b>	Masimasi	35.20	Darcy Winter	Greg Hopping	Pure Indulgence
<b>28-Nov</b>	Yellowfin	96.60	Sean Felise	Maselino Ioane	Last Minute
<b>27-Nov</b>	Yellowfin	108.60	Myers Teleso	Tim Teleso	Anita Pier
<b>29-Nov</b>	Yellowfin	109.60	Randy Sizemore	Greg Hopping	Pure Indulgence
<b>29-Nov</b>	Sailfish	40.20	Jacob Loughnan	Greg Hopping	Pure Indulgence
<b>28-Nov</b>	Sailfish	60.40	Peter	Geoff	Bella's Pride
<b>29-Nov</b>	Sailfish	60.80	Mike Levi	Vaughan Simpson	Fu'a II
<b>29-Nov</b>	Marlin	86.40	Sala McMoore	Peter Reid	Vaimalu
<b>27-Nov</b>	Marlin	129.60	Jacob Loughnan	Greg Hopping	Pure Indulgence
<b>29-Nov</b>	Marlin	144.00	Trilin	Toma	Amana