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SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

WORKSHOP ON PACIFIC INSHORE FISHERY RESOURCES
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**Country Statement
and Research Needs**

American Samoa

by
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Background

American Samoa is an unincorporated territory of the United States and consists of six high islands of volcanic origin and two coral atolls. Total population is around 37,000 and is increasing with emigration from Hawaii, the U.S. mainland and other Pacific Island nations. The population centers around Pago Pago Harbor on the main island of Tutuila are developing rapidly and marine awareness and natural resource conservation are becoming very important issues. Subsistence fishing is still extremely important to residents, but rapid development, modern fishing gear and a shift away from traditional lifestyles are placing increasing stress on nearshore marine resources.

The Office of Marine and Wildlife Resources (OMWR) has been engaged in fisheries development and research for many years under executive order of the Office of the Governor, American Samoa. Last year, the OMWR was officially established by legislative action affording the office more power and responsibility within the local government framework. Under this new status, the OMWR is mandated to manage, protect, preserve and perpetuate the marine and wildlife resources of the Territory. The office now has the ability to adopt and enforce conservation regulations in order to fulfill these directives.

OMWR Structure and Organization

The office is structured around a Director, Deputy Director and financial administrator who guide and coordinate the activities of the Fisheries, Wildlife, Statistics, Fisheries Development and Maintenance and Operations divisions. This year, a new field was added with the hiring of a program coordinator for marine and wildlife conservation awareness.

Fisheries Division Programs

An ongoing inshore and offshore fishery data collection and expansion system collects catch and effort data from subsistence, recreational, aquarium fish and local commercial fishermen.

Other activities of the Fisheries Division this year include monitoring of reef fish and benthic reef habitats through visual census, reef enhancement projects, a plankton and larval fish survey, bottomfish assessment, yellowfin tuna feeding study, FAD maintenance and evaluation and the development of the first comprehensive fishery management legislation for American Samoa.

The fisheries division will also be developing educational programs using slides, video and written material for use by the conservation awareness coordinator. These programs stress the wise use and conservation of marine resources.

This year, the Statistical Division is shifting all data bases from Apple DB Master to IBM compatible hardware using dBase III Plus and LOTUS. Other data bases will be designed as needed.

The Fisheries Division has provided technical assistance and field support to visiting research scientists and can continue to provide this support to pertinent, approved projects. Past visiting researchers have studied reef fish communities, marine turtles, sea birds, Nautilus, deepwater shrimp and fish tagging.

Technical Guidance

An increasing amount of time is engaged in providing technical guidance to federal, territorial and private sector parties concerning marine resource related issues. This is another indication of the rapid development occurring within the Territory. Coastal development in American Samoa is subject to U.S. federal environmental procedures and the OMWR provides comments and review to environmental assessments, environmental impact reports and draft development plans.

Research Needs

The OMWR Fisheries Division has a variety of data collection programs in place and other data bases will be established this year. Other projects, programs, field trips and meetings provide little time for data analysis and program modification. Managers working on small, insular projects often lose sight of the regional aspect of fisheries management. We do not need more projects. Instead, we require an expert in fisheries management and stock assessment to carefully examine our ongoing programs and modify them to better support regional fisheries management.

Summary

Many fisheries development projects experienced by the OMWR are now being implemented in other PI nations. The experiences gained during these programs should be shared with the other SPC nations to avoid pitfalls and decrease program costs. It is hoped that a result of this workshop will be better interisland communication and cooperation on issues of fisheries management and development.