



**Western
Pacific
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Chair Ebisui's Response to Gov. Lolo's statements in www.talane.com article

After reading the article titled "Governor defends ASG's no vote on LVPA" posted on www.talane.com (March 22, 2018), I am compelled to correct what appear to be misconceptions of the Council's actions taken on the LVPA.

First, the article says that the "rule that was instigated by the Council to allow longliners to fish within 12 miles from shore in local waters." The Council's 2015 action was to allow longline vessels to fish outside of 12 nm, not within 12 nm from shore and not within local waters.

Second, US-flagged longline vessels operating out of American Samoa target albacore tuna, a pelagic stock that is sold to the local cannery. American Samoa longline vessels do not target or incidentally catch bottomfish such as snappers, groupers, and jacks. There is simply no evidence to suggest that longline vessels would impact bottomfish stocks. It's like equating cricket to rugby – both are sports, but clearly much different.

According to the most recent stock assessment for bottomfish in American Samoa, bottomfish stocks are healthy and fished well below Maximum Sustainable Yield.

Third, the LVPA was developed by the Council in 2002 to address the potential for gear conflict and catch competition among commercial fishing vessels greater than 50 feet and smaller coastal fishing sectors, including pelagic troll, alias, and recreational fishers. However, since developing the LVPA, the longliners have experienced severe economic turmoil, with increasing costs and significantly reduced catch rates of albacore, while the alia longline fishery has virtually disappeared. Under the Magnuson Stevens Act, the Council is required to manage fisheries utilizing the best scientific information currently available. Here, the Council is proposing to adjust the size of a prohibited area that it created in 2002 to respond to significantly changed circumstances.

Last October, the Council considered the LVPA issue at its meeting held in American Samoa and recommended as initial action, an exemption for longline vessels greater than 50 feet permitted under the American Samoa longline limited entry program to fish seaward (outside) of: 12 nm around Tutuila; 12 nm around Manua; 12 nm around Swains; and 2 nm around the offshore banks. The Council's initial action on providing a 2 nm buffer around the offshore

banks was to accommodate troll vessels that fish near the banks for pelagic species such as yellowfin and skipjack tuna, wahoo, and masimasi.

I have concerns with the Governor's statement that "if the council withdraws its appeal, we are willing to sit down and talk with them. But don't force what they want on us." The Council is not forcing anything on the American Samoa Government. At its 173rd meeting held last week in Honolulu the Council requested that the American Samoa Government consider relevant information and meet with longline and alia fishermen and other interested parties; and further, that the American Samoa Government forward its recommendation to the Council for its consideration prior to taking final action. The Council is sincerely interested in hearing the Government of American Samoa's concerns for the preservation of cultural fishing and believes that resolution of this dispute cannot be achieved without constructive dialogue among the stakeholders.

- Ed Ebisui Jr.,
Chair, Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council
March 23, 2018