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EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT

The Honorable Gary Locke
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Locke:

On September 29, 2009, American Samoa was hit by a tsunami as a result of an earthquake which struck approximately 120 miles south of the islands of Samoa. The tsunami this earthquake generated made landfall in several Pacific island locations including American Samoa. The islands of American Samoa suffered extensive damage to our fishing harbor at Pago Pago; damaged and lost vessels, gear and shoreline facilities; as well as loss of revenue from fishing opportunity caused by these damages. Our assessment thus far includes 34 individual reports of losses to fishing vessels, gear, infrastructure, and lost fishing time. The value of the damages to vessels, gear, lost earnings, some infrastructure, and proposed projects aimed at restoring American Samoa's fisheries and preventing future disasters is preliminarily estimated at \$5 million.

Following the tsunami, President Barack Obama declared a major disaster for American Samoa; his declaration is attached (74 FR 51301; October 6, 2009). We are requesting that you make a determination that there is a fishery failure and establish a regional economic transition program to provide disaster relief assistance to fishermen, charter fishing, operations, processors, and owners of related fishery infrastructure affected by the tsunami, pursuant to Sections 312 and 315 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery conservation and Management Act (MSA) and Section 308(b) and (d) of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act and other Acts of Congress.

Sections 312 and 315 of the MSA contain specific provisions to provide funds for fishery disaster relief and coastal disaster relief. Pursuant to Section 312, "at the discretion of the Secretary (of Commerce) or at the request of the Governor of an affected State or a fishing community, the Secretary shall determine whether there is a commercial fishery failure due to a fishery resource disaster as a result of natural causes...."

Section 315 states "When there is a catastrophic regional fishery disaster the Secretary may, upon the request of, and in consultation with, the Governors of affected States, establish a regional economic transition program to provide immediate disaster relief assistance to the fishermen, charter fishing operators, United States fish processors, and owners of related fishery infrastructure affected by the disaster." Further, Section 315 allows that the program shall

provide funds or other economic assistance to affected entities, or to governmental entities for disbursement to affected entities, for:

- (A) Meeting immediate regional shoreside fishery infrastructure needs, including processing facilities, cold storage facilities, ice houses, docks, including temporary docks and storage facilities, and other related shoreside fishery support facilities and infrastructure while ensuring that those projects will not result in an increase or replacement of fishing capacity;
- (B) Financial assistance and job training assistance for fishermen who wish to remain in a fishery in the region that may be temporarily closed as a result of environmental or other effects associated with the disaster;
- (C) Funding to fishermen who are willing to scrap a fishing vessel and permanently surrender permits for fisheries named on that vessel;
- (D) Any other activities authorized under section 312 this Act or section 308(d) of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act of 1986.

In order to assist this determination, we have completed an assessment of damages incurred by fishery participants, vessel owners, fishery infrastructure and businesses, to document the damage and associated loss of revenues to our fishing industry. Attached to this letter are a group of attachments which provide information on American Samoa's fishing industry and the impacts of the tsunami on the community, on landings, and on fishery participants including photo documentation of damages. Please let me know, after reviewing the attached documents, if there is additional information needed.

American Samoa's commercial fisheries provide an important source of seafood produce and revenue for the fishing community which in American Samoa is the entire island population. The tsunami, a catastrophic natural event, damaged infrastructure including docks, vessels and gear; and resulted in lost fishing time and opportunity for many fishery participants.

American Samoa's fishing economy has been particularly hard this past year with the closing of one of our major employers, the Chick-of-the-Sea tuna cannery, as well as the devastation brought on by the tsunami. We therefore request you to commence actions to set forth a regional economic transition program to provide immediate disaster relief assistance to the fishing community in American Samoa. Please let us know what we can do to assist with facilitating this process including providing additional information. Thank you very much for your consideration of this most important matter.

Sincerely,



FAOA A. SUNIA
Lieutenant Governor

cc: Dr. Jane Lubchenco, NOAA Fisheries
Dr. James W. Balsiger, NOAA Fisheries
Mr. Ray Tulafono, AS DMWR
Mr. William Robinson, NMFS PIRO
Ms. Kitty Simonds, WPRFMC

Attachments

- 1) Evaluation of the Impacts of the Tsunami on American Samoa's Fishing Community and Fisheries
- 2) Report on Tsunami Effects on the Fishing Community of American Samoa including photos (10 pp.)
- 3) Preliminary Damage Assessment Report prepared by American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (3 pp.)
- 4) A preliminary Assessment of the impact of the Tsunami on the Coral Reefs of Tutuila Island prepared by American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (15 pp.)
- 5) American Samoa Pelagic Fisheries Annual Report (57 pp.)
- 6) Photos of Tsunami-caused Damages
- 7) Federal Register notice of the President's Declaration of a Major Disaster for American Samoa (2 pp.)