

Talofa lau susuga Mageo,

Thank you again for agreeing to provide your review of the National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa's Condition Report, which focuses on the period 2007–2020. Our staff has identified you as a particularly suitable expert who could provide substantive comments that would improve the document prior to dissemination. We request your written comments by March 18, 2022 which provides about a month for review.

Condition Reports are tools employed periodically by NOAA in an effort to consistently assess the condition and trends of sanctuary resources and ecosystem services within national marine sanctuaries. The report helps identify gaps in current monitoring efforts, as well as factors that may require additional focus and effort in the years to come. The data presented in the report is not meant to be encyclopedic, but rather to help illustrate the state of knowledge and summarize important scientific information currently available to characterize the region in order to inform an upcoming review of the sanctuary's Management Plan, which is projected to begin in 2023.

Below you will find basic background information about the report and its various interrelated sections, as well as a table of contents that will allow you to move within the document sections easily.

Background

This condition report provides a summary of the current status and trends of National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa resources and ecosystem services. Status is rated on a scale from good to poor. Trends in the status of resources are also reported, and are based on the time period of 2007–2020. Evaluations of status and trends were made during virtual workshops in 2020 by sanctuary staff, in consultation with subject matter experts, based on interpretation of quantitative and, when necessary, non-quantitative assessments and observations of scientists, managers and users. Therefore, ratings reflect the collective opinion among experts based on their knowledge and perceptions of local problems.

A few things to note:

- Condition reports are meant to be concise descriptions of the status and trends of sanctuary resources and ecosystem services. Dozens of indicators and associated data are presented and it is not possible to provide extensive detail on any one indicator or data set. Therefore, as you review the document, please do so recognizing that the report is much like a summary that is based on data that may not be presented in detail within the report. To the extent possible, references and links to existing data are given, and appropriate summary graphics or data are shown, but original sources are likely to contain much more information than the condition report.
- In a few instances there are outstanding comments inserted into the documents where authors have noted the need for additional information.
- All responses begin with italicized text. This information will be converted into a graphic when the report is finalized. The intent is to serve as a “quick look” summary of each assessment. Remember that the status description statements are standardized condition

report language that can not be edited and the rationale statements are unique to the NMSAS condition report.

- Literature cited and appendix figures currently follow each response, but will eventually be moved into their own, separate section.
- Following Peer Review an Executive Summary and Concluding Remarks section will be drafted.
- At the final stage of report development professional copy editing and formatting will occur, so please do not spend time on these smaller details (including formatting of literature citations). Instead, please focus on content.

The resource questions and definitions of ecosystem services rated in the report are consistent across all sanctuaries in the system. The interpretation of the questions and ecosystem services by sanctuary staff and participating experts, as well as their responses, are standardized according to the descriptions and explanations provided in Appendices A and B. We are not requesting your review of this appendix, as these standards were established by the original panel of experts who designed our system-wide monitoring program. We ask that your review focus on the body of the report, Chapters 1-9. We are particularly interested in your expert opinion of our judgments of resource status and trends, the rationales for judgment, and whether you feel that other data could or should have been incorporated into the ratings of status and trends. We welcome any recommendations you may have regarding additional data or information sources that may significantly improve assessments of resource conditions, keeping in mind our desire for conciseness.

More information about the condition report process is available in this [video](#) and this [pdf](#).

Peer Review and Posting of Review Comments

In December 2004, the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued a Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review (OMB Bulletin) establishing peer review standards that would enhance the quality and credibility of the federal government's scientific information. Among other information, these standards apply to Influential Scientific Information (ISI), which is information that can reasonably be determined to have a "clear and substantial impact on important public policies or private sector decisions."

Current OMB Bulletin guidelines require that reviewer comments, identities, and affiliations be posted on the Department of Commerce (DOC) website:

http://www.cio.noaa.gov/services_programs/prplans/PRsummaries.html.

Reviewer comments, however, will not be attributed to specific individuals. As you know, this is not consistent with traditional scientific peer review standards, which generally call for anonymity. This issue has been raised with OMB, and guidance may change in the future. Until then, we will comply with the published guidelines.

Therefore, by agreeing to be a reviewer for this report, you must agree to allow your comments to be posted on the web, along with those of other reviewers, and have your name and affiliation posted, though the names will not be linked to specific comments.

Conflict of Interest

For this review process, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) adapted the National Academy of Sciences' (NAS) policy for committee selection with respect to evaluating conflicts of interest when selecting peer reviewers who are not federal government employees. Please read the conflict of interest policy ([available here](#)) and complete and return the attached Conflict of Interest form by email to Kathy.Broughton@noaa.gov.

Specific Instructions

The document is available on [google drive here](#):

[Introduction](#)

[Sanctuary Setting](#)

[Driving Forces and Pressures](#)

State of Sanctuary Resources

[Introduction](#)

[State of Water Quality](#)

[State of Habitat](#)

[State of Living Resources](#)

[State of Maritime Heritage Resources](#)

State of Ecosystem Services

[Introduction](#)

[Non-Consumptive Recreation](#)

[Consumptive Recreation](#)

[Science](#)

[Education](#)

[Heritage and Sense of Place](#)

[Commercial Harvest](#)

[Subsistence Harvest](#)

[Coastal Protection](#)

[Response](#)

[Appendix A: Questions and Rating Schemes for State of Sanctuary Resources](#)

[Appendix B: Definitions and Rating Schemes for State of Ecosystem Services](#)

[Appendix C: 2007 Fagatele Bay Condition Report Ratings](#)

[Appendix D: Methods](#)

[Appendix E: Glossary of Terms](#)

If you are unable to access the report, or wish to review the report as a Word document, please contact Kathy Broughton (Kathy.Broughton@noaa.gov) who is serving as the Point of Contact for this project. Please make your edits and comments in **SUGGESTING mode**. Click on the 'editing' drop down box located at the far upper right corner of your navigation menu and select

‘suggesting’ from the options. Additional directions for using suggesting mode may be found [here](#), if you need assistance, again, please contact Kathy. To Comment in Google Docs, select the items you wish to comment on, click the Comment Box and click “Comment” to save your comment, note this is different from Word in that you cannot just hit enter to submit a comment. Please note that this is a draft report and should not be distributed.

Due to the size and complexity of the sanctuary, the report is quite lengthy. We encourage you to help us trim the document, suggesting areas where material could be removed without compromising the report. We have tried to reduce redundancy by including internal linkages within the document, and will continue to consolidate using that approach. While we are able to add material that supports the rationale and rankings determined by workshop participants, we are hesitant to swell the length of the report unless absolutely necessary.

On behalf of the staff of the National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa and the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, we thank you for taking the time to review this report. I am confident that your assistance will improve the quality of the document so that our management decisions can rely on the best available science and dependable judgments of knowledgeable experts.

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