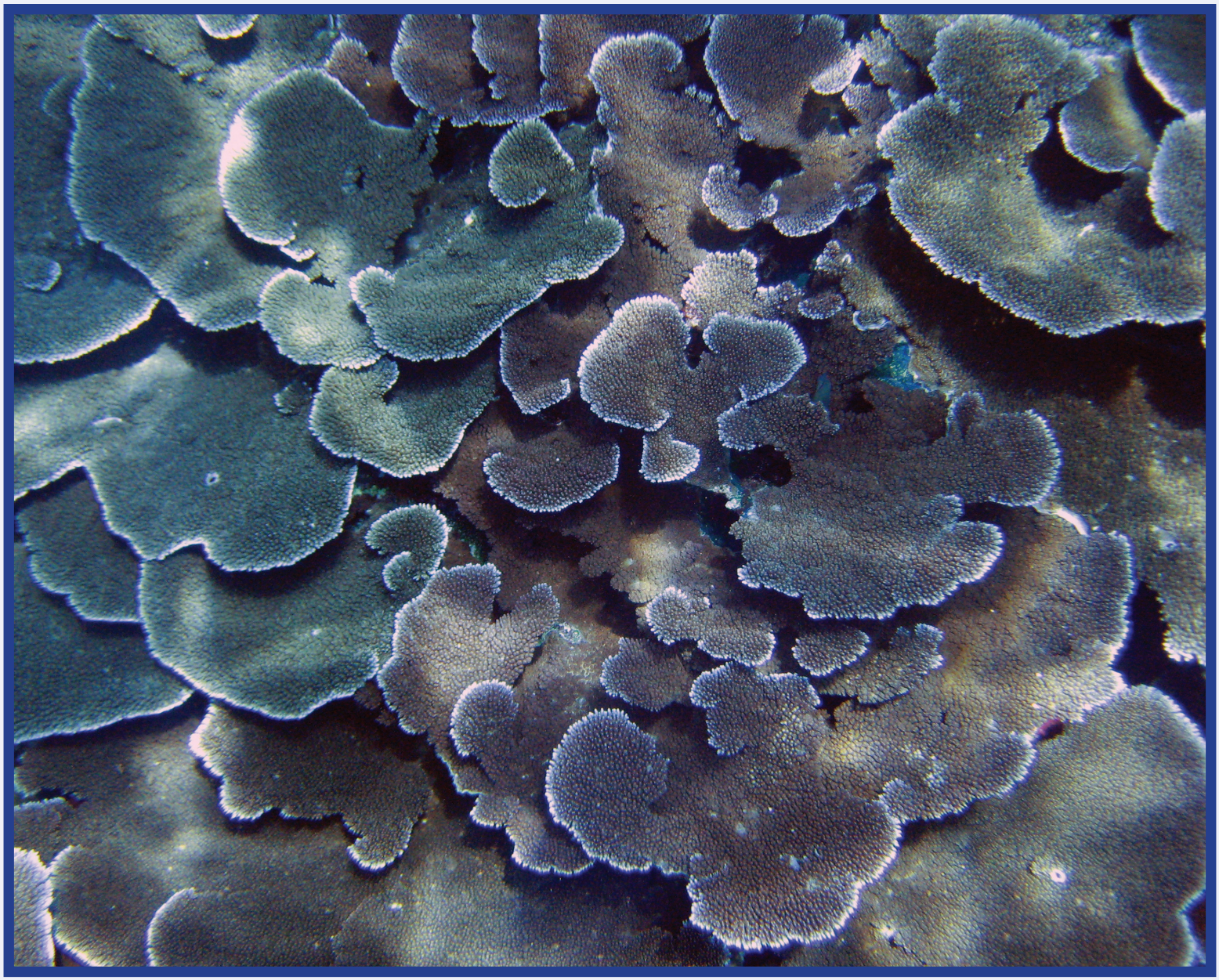
A Biogeographic Assessment of the Samoan Archipelago



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The graphic wrapped on the cover was created by Kang Sevao of American Samoa and used with permission here. This tapa design symbolizes the creation of land and sea. The processes of island formation and reef growth are central to understanding biogeography of the Samoan Archipelago.

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ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This assessment represents the continuation of ongoing partnerships between NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS), Center for Coastal Monitoring and Assessment (CCMA), Biogeography Branch and the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) and Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP). The Biogeography Branch has applied a biogeographical approach to inform the management of marine resources within both coral reefs and National Marine Sanctuaries since 1998. To date, nine ONMS sites and most of the coral reef ecosystems in US states and territories have had some level of biogeographic characterization or mapping completed through these partnerships.

The results of this ecological characterization are available via website. For more information on this project and those in other ONMS and reef ecosystem locations please visit the Biogeography Branch webpage at http://ccma.nos.noaa.gov/about/biogeography/ or direct questions and comments to:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the marine biogeography of the Samoan Archipelago (~14º S latitude along the international date-line) with a focus on regional ocean climate, connectivity among islands due to larval transport, distributions of reef fish and coral communities, and the extent of existing marine protected areas. Management decisions and prior assessments in the archipelago have typically been split along the international political boundary between the islands of Samoa and those of American Samoa despite their close proximity and shared resources. A key goal in this assessment was to compile data from both jurisdictions and to conduct the characterization across the entire archipelago. The report builds upon earlier assessments by re-analyzing and interpreting many pre-existing datasets, adding more recent biogeographic data sources, and by combining earlier findings into a multidisciplinary summary of marine biogeography.

Image 1. A coral reef in the National Park of American Samoa near Vatia. Photo credit: Matt Kendall, NOAA Biogeography.

The assessment is divided into 5 chapters and supporting appendices. Each chapter was written and reviewed in collaboration with subject matter specialists and local experts. In Chapter 1, a short introduction to the overall scope and approach of the report is provided. In Chapter 2, regional ocean climate is characterized using remote sensing datasets and discussed in the context of local observations. In Chapter 3, regional ocean currents and transport of coral and fish larvae are investigated among the islands of the archipelago and surrounding island nations. In Chapter 4, distinct reef fish and coral communities across the archipelago are quantified on the basis of overall biodiversity, abundance, and community structure. In Chapter 5, the existing network of MPAs in American Samoa is evaluated based on the habitats, reef fish, and coral communities that are encompassed. Appendices provide analytical details omitted from some chapters for brevity as well as supplemental datasets needed as inputs for the main chapters in the assessment. Appendices include an inventory of regional seamounts, a description of shore to shelf edge benthic maps produced for Tutuila, analytical details of reef fish and coral datasets, and supplemental information on the many marine protected areas in American Samoa.

The main objectives and some key findings of each chapter are as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

- Objectives were to introduce the physical setting of the archipelago and describe the scope and main components of the biogeographic assessment.

Chapter 2: Oceanography of the Samoan Archipelago

- Objectives were to summarize regional atmospheric and oceanographic conditions as well as trends in winds, waves, currents, sea surface temperature, chlorophyll, and sea surface height anomalies, and discuss potential influences they may have on biogeography of Samoan reef ecosystems.
- Ocean conditions in the region are characterized by small seasonal fluctuations and often much larger multiyear fluctuations in response to broad climatic cycles such as the Southern Oscillation/El Niño. The major source of variability is seasonal for winds, waves, and sea surface temperature whereas chlorophyll and sea surface height are affected more by interannual processes.

- Nearly all aspects of ocean climate for the archipelago vary more significantly by latitude than by longitude such that all islands except Swains, ~400 km to the north of the archipelago, experience very similar conditions.
- The archipelago has relatively more stable oceanic conditions compared to latitudes to the north and south.
- Key climate related changes include gradual sea level rise as well as periodic low sea level events corresponding to El Niño and also rising surface water temperatures and the threat of coral bleaching.

Chapter 3: Ocean currents and larval transport among islands and shallow seamounts of the Samoan Archipelago and adjacent island nations.

- Objectives were to describe regional ocean currents, identify key sources and destinations of coral and fish larvae for each island, and understand the influence of various combinations of larval life history characteristics on larval connections.
- Major surface currents identified around the archipelago were the meandering westward flow of the South Equatorial Current (SEC) directly across the archipelago (13-19º S), the eastward flowing South Equatorial Counter Current (SECC) (8-12º S) that seasonally (October – April) bifurcates the surface flow of the SEC, and a regularly occurring eddy south of the archipelago centered at ~16º S and 172º W.
- A wide range of larval longevities (10 to 100 days), mortality rates (3-46 % daily mortality), and settlement zones (9 to 36 km from islands) were investigated.
- Major sources of larvae in the region are likely to be the large islands of Samoa, which contribute over twice as many larvae as the smaller islands of American Samoa.
- Current transport is primarily westward along the archipelago such that each island tends to seed its natal reefs (especially with short-lived larvae) and island neighbors to the west (especially with long-lived larvae). In addition, the north coasts of Samoa may seed the islands of American Samoa via the feedback loops connecting the SECC with the SEC for organisms with long larval durations.
- Current orientations and the long distance from upstream islands suggest the archipelago is heavily dependent on internal sources of larvae to sustain reef populations. Predicted connections among islands suggest potential benefits to coordinated management of marine resources and conservation planning between Samoa and American Samoa.

Chapter 4: Biogeographic assessment of fish and coral communities of the Samoan Archipelago.

- Objectives were to identify geographic patterns of hotspots, breakpoints, and spatial trends in reef fish and coral communities among and within islands of the archipelago.
- Analysis focused on six variables: coral cover, coral diversity, coral community structure, fish biomass, fish diversity, and fish community structure.
- Results from 8 studies were combined to determine regions with high, medium, and low values for each variable.
- 30 distinct biogeographic regions with distinct patterns in one or more variables were identified across the archipelago.
- 51 regional hotspots with relatively high values for particular fish or coral variables were identified.
- Regions that were hotspots for several variables were northern, northeastern, and southern Savai'i, Swains Island, Ofu and Olosega Islands, Aunu'u and the eastern tip of Tutuila, southwestern Tutuila, and the Fagamalo area of northwestern Tutuila.
- Regions that were not hotspots for any variables investigated included the Apolima Strait between Upolu and Savai'i, the north coast of Upolu, and parts of the northwest coast of Tutuila.
- Regions that were identified as having unique reef fish and/or coral communities included southern Savai'i, Pago Pago Harbor, Aunu'u, Rose Atoll, and Swains Island.

Chapter 5: The existing network of marine protected areas in American Samoa.

- Objectives were to characterize the reef fishes, corals, habitats, and other key features of each existing MPA, evaluate the distribution of MPA sites in the context of the biogeographic regions and ecological hotspots defined in Chapter 4, summarize the area of reef ecosystem that is currently protected, by bottom type and reef type, and identify potentially important areas not currently in the network. Unlike the

other chapters, analysis was restricted to American Samoa due to the lack of needed input datasets for Samoa. Creation of benthic maps and GIS datasets of MPA boundaries and regulations should be a priority for conservation planning and resource management in Samoa.

- There are 23 MPAs in American Samoa managed by Territorial, Federal, or combined authorities.
- Only 8% of the potential coral reef ecosystem (defined as bottom regions less than 150 m deep) in American Samoa is within existing MPAs. Only 3% has complete no-take restrictions.
- Fourteen of the twenty ecologically distinct biogeographic regions identified around American Samoa include at least one MPA, leaving only six with no representation in the present MPA network.
- High-value regions (those that were hotspots for 3 reef fish/coral variables) represented in the existing MPA network include southwestern Tutuila, the Fagamalo area, and Ofu and Olosega Islands. High-value regions lacking an MPA in the network include Aunu'u, the eastern tip of Tutuila, and Swains Island.
- Regions not currently represented in the existing MPA network that have been identified as having unique reef fish and/or coral communities include only Swains Island and Aunu'u.
- A comprehensive and coordinated MPA network strategy based on the findings of this study and other information is needed to define and accomplish conservation and resource management goals across the entire archipelago.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY TRANSLATED IN SAMOAN

TALA 'OTO'OTO

Translation provided by Veronika Mata'utia Mortenson. O lenei ripoti ua saunia faapitoa e su'esu'e ai le atoatoa o le olaga faa-natura o meaola o le sami i totonu o le atu-Samoa (~14º S o le ekueta, latalata i le laina o loo sui ai aso o le lalolagi) ma e patino lenei lomiga i tulaga o le tau, fesoota'iga ma isi atu-motu ona o feoa'iga o fua o i'a, faasoasoaina o nofoaga o i'a, ā'au ma 'amu, faapea ma le tulaga o loo iai nei nofoaga faasao o le sami. O Amerika Samoa ma Samoa Tuto'atasi o ni motu e tu lalata ma e masani i le fefa'asoa'i o le tamaoaiga faa-natura, peita'i, o faai'uga ma ni isi o su'esu'ega na faatino i totonu o le atu-Samoa ua le maua iai se maliega ona o le ese'esega o faiga-nuu ma faiga-mālo. O le faamoemoe maualuga o lenei ripoti o le tuufaatasia lea o ni faamaumauga ma faaiuga e uiga i le ola faa-natura i Amerika Samoa ma Samoa. O le oto'otoina o lenei lomiga na tuufaatasia mai i le anoano o su'esu'ega ua mae'a ona fa'asalalau, faapea le taumafaiga e tuu atu iai ma ni isi o faamatalaga lata mai e uiga i nofoaga o meaola o le sami..

O su'esu'ega o loo i totonu o lenei Ripoti ua mafai ona vaevaeina i ni mataupu se 5, faapea ma ni isi o faamatalaga e sapasapai ai mataupu ta'itasi. O mataupu uma ua faamauina, na tusia ma iloiloina e ni isi ua atamai ma iai agavaa faapitoa i le aotelega o lenei tusiga. I le Mataupu 1, o le upu tomua e faailoa ai galuega ma tulaga i loo i totonu o le ripoti. O le Mataupu 2 o loo faamatala ai fesuisuiaiga o le tau, mai molimau a tagata lautele faapea ai ma ni isi o su'esu'ega faa-saienisi. I le Mataupu 3, o le gasologa o le āu ma le femālagaa'i o fua o 'amu ma i'a i le va o Samoa ma isi atu-motu. I le Mataupu 4, o le aofa'iga o i'a-ā'au ua lauiloa ma ituaiga 'amu ese'ese ua mafai ona faavasega i le anoanoa'i ma le felanulanua'i o ituaiga ese'ese. I le Mataupu 5, o le iloiloina o le fesootaiga o gataifale faasao i Amerika Samoa e afua mai lea i le mata'ituina o ituaiga i'a ese'ese ma ituaiga 'amu o loo maua ai. O isi Faamatalaga i le pito i tua o le Ripoti o loo auili'ili atu ai ni isi o mataupu taua. O loo aofia ai foi ma le faitau aofa'i o tama'i mauga o loo i le alititai, faapea faamatalaga o le faafanuaina o le talafatai e oo atu i le alititai, ma ni isi o faamatalaga e uiga i gataifale faasao i totonu o Amerika Samoa.

O le taula'iga ma vaega faapitoa o mataupu ta'itasi:

Mataupu 1: Upu Tomua

- O ta'iala, na faaogaina e faalauiloa ai tulaga o atu-motu ma sa faapea ona faaoga fo'i e faamatala ai le faasoasoaina o meaola i lea motu.

Mataupu 2: Su'esu'ega o le Sami i le atu-Samoa.

- Na faaogaina ta'iala e 'oto'oto ai tulaga o le 'ea ma le sami, faapea ma le tulaga o matagi, o galu, o le tafe o le āu, vevela ma le loloto o le sami – e tau sa'ili ai fesoota'iga o nei mea uma i ā'au ma 'amu o le atu-Samoa.
- O le tulaga ole aga'i i luga ma lalo o le suasami ua mafai nei ona maitauina ona o le vevela o le kelope i le El Niño. O le mafua'aga 'autu o lenei lugā lalō e oso masina pe faa-vāimasina mo matagi, galu ma le vevela o le suasami, a o le a'afia o le maualuga masani o le suasami e oso faa-vāitausaga.
- Se'i vaganā ai le motu o Swains, ~400 km i mātu o le atu-Samoa, e toeitiiti lava tutusa tulaga o le tau i le sami o atu-motu uma e tu lalata i le ekueta.
- O le atu-Samoa e tutusa lelei tulaga o le sami i le itu i matū ma saute o le ekueta.
- O suiga ua tula'i mai i fesuiaiga o le tau e aofia ai le si'isi'i malie i luga o le maualuga masani o le suasami faapea ai ma le maualalo tele ona o le El Niño.

Mataupu 3: O āu o le sami ma le femalagaa'i o fua-o-i'a ma figota i le va o motu faapea tama'i mauga ua ola i le alititai.

- O le 'autū o lenei mataupu o le faamatalaina lea o le ala o āu o le sami, faailo mafua'aga taua o taunu'uga o le femalagaā'i o 'amu ma fua-o-i'a i le va o motu ta'itasi, ma le malamalama'aga i le feso'otaiga o meaola uma o le sami.
- O āu o le sami i totonu o atu-motu ua mafai ona faamau i tusitusiga e aofia ai le South Equatorial Current (SEC) ma e tafe aga'i i sisifo, o le South Equatorial Counter Current (SECC) (8-12º S) e tafe aga'i i sasa'e mai le masina o Oketopa – Aperila ma e vaelua e lenei āu le tafe a le SEC, ma ei totonu o le ~16º i Saute ma 172º i Sisifo.
- O le tele ma le umi o le olaga o fua o i'a (10 i le 100 aso), o le saoasaoa o le faatama'ia o fua-o-i'a (3-46 % i le aso), ma mea o loo ofaga ai (9 i le 36 km mai motu ta'itasi) sa mafai ona su'esu'eina.
- O le anoanoa'i o fua-o-i'a o loo masalomia e tele i motu tetele o Samoa Tuto'atasi, ma fa'aluaina i lo motu laiti o Amerika Samoa.
- O le malaga a fua-o-i'a e tele na aga'i atu i le itu i sisifo ma e 'umi lo latou ola i lo fua-o-i'a e aga'i atu i sasa'e. Ma o le isi, o le tafā-tai i matū o Samoa Tuto'atasi ua mafai ona faafailele ai fua-o-i'a ona toe taamilo mai lea ma aga'i mai i Amerika Samoa.
- Talu ai le mamao o motu, e iai le talitonuga e ao ona faamoemoe le atu-Samoa i fua-o-i'a nei aua le faatupula'ia ma le faaleleia o ā'au. O lenei fesootaiga i le atu-Samoa e aoga tele i le galulue fa'atasi o Samoa-na-lua i le faia lea o faaiuga ma ni maliega 'autasi – aua le puipuia atili o le tamaoaiga a Samoa Tuto'atasi ma Amerika Samoa.

Mataupu 4: Su'esu'ega o ituaiga i'a ma 'amu ese'ese i le atu-Samoa.

- O sini o nei su'esu'ega o le faailo lea o le anoanoa'i o 'auala ese'ese o loo lamatia ai le olaga o i'a ma 'amu i tafātai ma totonu o le atu-Samoa.
- O nei su'esu'ega na faapito i ni vaega se ono: aofa'iga o 'amu, ituaiga 'amu ese'ese, anoano o 'amu ese'ese i se nofoaga e tasi, o le aofa'iga o le mamafa o i'a i se nofoaga e tasi, ituaiga i'a ese'ese, ma le ituaiga nofoaga e ofaga ai i'a.
- O taunuuga o su'esu'ega e 8 na tuufaatasi e tau sa'ili ai poo fea vaega e maualuga, feololo ma maualalo.
- I totonu o le atu-Samoa, e 30 ni nofoaga na mafai ona faailoa ona o le ma'oti o le itua'iga e tasi pe sili atu fo'i.
- E 51 ni vaega vevela o le sami mai maugamu o loo mauluga ai le faitau aofa'i ma le aoga o i'a ma 'amu.
- O vaega vevela o le sami sa tele ai meaola ese'ese o matū, matū-i-sasa'e, ma sauté o Savai'i, Motu o Swains, Ofu ma Olosega, Aunu'u ma itu i sasa'e o Tutuila, faapea le itu i sauté-sisifo, ma Fagamalo.
- O isi nofoaga e le'i agava'a i vaega vevela o le sami e aofia ai le āva i Apolima i le va o Upolu ma Savai'i, le talafātai i matū o le motu o Upolu, ma ni vaega o le gataifale i matū-i-sasa'e o Tutuila.
- O ni isi nofoaga sa mafai ona iloa ai le tutasi o i'a-a'au ma 'amu ese'ese o Savai'i, Pago Pago, Aunu'u ma le Motu o Swains.

Mataupu 5: O le feso'ota'iga o nofoaga faasao o le gataifale i Amerika Samoa.

- O le manulauti, o le faavasegaina lea o ituaiga i'a, 'amu, le mea o loo ofaga ai, ma isi faailo ua tāua mo Gataifale Faasao - i le faatusatusaina lea i eria o loo 'oā i le tamaoaiga e pei ona faailoa atu i le Mataupu 4.

E le pei o isi Mataupu, sa tapula'a su'esu'ega i Amerika Samoa ona e le'i iai ni faamaumauga mai Samoa. O le fausiaina o ni ata ma faafanua o le alititai e tatau ona tapena iai Samoa, faapea ma ni faamaumauga (GIS) e iloa ai tonu tuā'oi ma tulafono i le puipuiina o le tamaoaiga.

- E 23 ni gataifale faasao o loo iai nei i Amerika Samoa, ma o loo pulea e le Teritori, Malo Feterale, ma isi pulega.
- Na o le 8% o ā'au (e faauiga o nofoaga o loo i le loloto e 150 m) i Amerika Samoa ei totonu o gataifale faasao. E na o le 3% e le mafai ona fagotaina.
- Mai i le sefulufa o nofoaga faapitoa ua mafai ona tāmau i faamaumauga i Amerika Samoa, o loo iai lava se Gataifale Faasao se tasi i totonu o lenei sefulufa, ma e ono e le o maua iai ni faamaumauga i le fesootaiga o gataifale faasao o loo iai nei.
- O nofoaga o loo maualuga le oā o puna'oa (le vaega sa 'avea ma tulaga vevela o le sami mo i'a ma 'amu ese'ese) i totonu o Gataifale Faasao e aofia ai le itu i saute-sisifo o Tutuila, Fagamalo, ma Ofu & Olosega. O nofoaga o loo maualuga ai puna'oa e le o mafai ona tuu i totonu o le fesootaiga o gataifale faasao a Amerika Samoa e aofia ai Aunu'u, le itu i sasa'e o Tutuila faapea ai ma le Motu o Swains.
- O nofoaga o loo tutasi ma tele ai le tamaoaiga, ma e le o iai i totonu o le li'o o Gataifale Faasao e aofia ai na'o le Motu o Swains ma Aunu'u.
- O loo mana'omia ni faamaumauga maumaututū e uiga i le fesootaiga o Gataifale Faasao, ina ia mafai ona aoga i le uiga ma ni taunuuga lelei o le faasao ma puipui atili o le tamaoaiga faa-natura i le atu-Samoa.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE BIOGEOGRAPHIC ASSESSMENT 1

CHAPTER 2 OCEANOGRAPHY OF THE SAMOAN ARCHIPELAGO 3
INTRODUCTION 3
DATA AND METHODS 3
RESULTS 4
CONCLUSIONS 22
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 24
REFERENCES 25

CHAPTER 3: OCEAN CURRENTS AND LARVAL TRANSPORT AMONG ISLANDS AND SHALLOW SEAMOUNTS OF THE SAMOAN ARCHIPELAGO AND ADJACENT ISLAND NATIONS 27
INTRODUCTION 27
METHODS 28
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION 35
CONCLUSIONS 90
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 92
REFERENCES 93

CHAPTER 4: BIOGEOGRAPHIC ASSESSMENT OF FISH AND CORAL COMMUNITIES OF THE SAMOAN ARCHIPELAGO 97
INTRODUCTION 97
METHODS 98
RESULTS 104
CONCLUSIONS 114
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 118
REFERENCES 119

CHAPTER 5: THE EXISTING NETWORK OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN AMERICAN SAMOA 123
INTRODUCTION 123
METHODS 125
RESULTS: BENTHIC HABITATS OF AMERICAN SAMOA 129
RESULTS: SITE CHARACTERIZATIONS 130
RESULTS: MPA NETWORK ANALYSES 174
CONCLUSIONS 180
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 182
REFERENCES 183

APPENDIX A: SEAMOUNTS WITHIN THE EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONES OF SAMOA AND AMERICAN SAMOA 189
APPENDIX B: SHORELINE TO SHELF EDGE BENTHIC MAPS OF TUTUILA, AMERICAN SAMOA 197
APPENDIX C: FISH AND CORAL DATA PLOTS 205
APPENDIX D: KEY ATTRIBUTES AND ACTIVITIES OF MPAS IN THE EXISTING NETWORK OF MPAS IN AMERICAN SAMOA AS OF JANUARY 2011. 225

List of Tables

Table 2.1. Original data sources. 4
Table 3.1. Full factorial ANOVA on the effects of region, season, and ENSO status on median drifter heading. 36
Table 3.2. Full factorial ANOVA on the effects of region, season, and ENSO status on mean drifter speed. 36
Table 3.3. Islands, seamounts, or island groups used as source locations in simulations of regional larval connectivity, their corresponding potential reef area (0-150 m shelf), number of virtual larvae used in modeling, and the percentage of the simulated larval pool contributed by each source. 42
Table 4.1. List of datasets and variables used in the analysis. 100
Table 4.2. Assigned breakpoints between low and medium (L → M) and medium and high (M → H) values for each of the fish and coral variables by dataset. 102
Table 4.3. Hotspot analysis summary table. 113
Table 5.1. Existing MPAs in American Samoa as of January 2011. 126
Table 5.2. Biogeographic regions, ecological hotspots, and overlap with existing MPAs. 176
Table 5.3. Potential reef ecosystem area (km^2) by benthic structure type for existing MPAs. 179
Table A.1. Locations and morphological characteristics of seamounts within the EEZ of American Samoa and Samoa. 193
Table D.1. General description of MPA implementation and management. 225
Table D.2. Conservation focus and management practices. 226
Table D.3. Biological and socio-economic monitoring/assessment and community involvement. 227
Table D.4. Current and future projects. 228

List of Figures

Figure 1.1. Samoan Archipelago study region.. ... 1
Figure 2.1. Wind direction measured by the QuikSCAT satellite. ... 5
Figure 2.2. Path and intensity of cyclones passing through the EEZs of Samoa or American Samoa from 2000-2007... 6
Figure 2.3. Major surface currents of the Southern Pacific Ocean adapted from Tomczak and Godfrey (2003). ... 7
Figure 2.4. Sea surface temperature data from CoRTAD presented as an average annual cycle. ... 8
Figure 2.5. Sea surface temperatures from CoRTAD. ... 9
Figure 2.6. Sea surface temperature and anomaly values from CoRTAD for the years 1985 to 2006. ... 10
Figure 2.7. Sea surface temperature anomalies from CoRTAD during the month of July for the years 1997 to 2005. ... 11
Figure 2.8. Sea surface temperature anomaly plots for warmest water month... 12
Figure 2.9. Bleaching alert time-series from NOAA Coral Reef Watch. ... 13
Figure 2.10. Chlorophyll concentration estimated from SeaWiFS and presented as an average annual cycle... 14
Figure 2.11. Chlorophyll concentration estimated from the SeaWiFS satellite. ... 15
Figure 2.12. Chlorophyll concentrations estimated from SeaWiFS for the years 1997 to 2005... 16
Figure 2.13. Chlorophyll anomalies estimated from SeaWiFS for June 2002 and April 2005... 17
Figure 2.14. Sea level values for Pago Pago, American Samoa from 1948 to 2008. ... 17
Figure 2.15. Sea surface height anomalies from AVISO are presented as an average annual cycle... 18
Figure 2.16. Sea surface height anomalies from AVISO... 19
Figure 2.17. Sea surface height anomalies from AVISO for the years 1993 to 2006... 20
Figure 2.18. Sea surface height anomalies from AVISO during the month of March for the years 1993 to 2006... 21
Figure 2.19. Linear regression of maximum monthly sea level deviation versus SOI during El Niño events since 1954... 22
Figure 2.20. Sea Surface Temperature from CoRTAD at the intersection of 170° W longitude (the approximate boundary between Samoa and American Samoa) and 0°, 5° S, 10° S, 15° S, 20° S, 25° S, and 30° S latitude respectively... 23
Figure 3.1. Samoan Archipelago and surrounding islands depicted by the 9 km grid cells of the HYCOM hydrodynamic model... 28
Figure 3.2. Example of regional current vectors. ... 30
Figure 3.3. Tonga Trench Eddy. ... 30
Figure 3.4. Example of typical drifter paths. January 2007 drifters shown... 31
Figure 3.5. Box plots of median current headings by region, season, and ENSO conditions based on drifter data... 35
Figure 3.6. Median current headings by season and region based on drifter data... 36
Figure 3.7. Box plots of median current speeds by region, season, and ENSO conditions based on drifter data... 37
Figure 3.8. Mean gross and net displacement of drifters after 10, 20, 30, 50, and 100 days. ... 37
Figure 3.9a. Gross displacement of individual drifters as a frequency histogram after 10, 20 ,30, 50 and 100 days at large. ... 38
Figure 3.9b. Net displacement of individual drifters as a frequency histogram after 10, 20 ,30, 50 and 100 days at large. ... 39
Figure 3.10a. Surface current patterns of the Samoan EEZs and surrounding region for October through April... 40
Figure 3.10b. Surface current patterns of the Samoan EEZs and surrounding region for May through September. ... 40
Figure 3.11. Proportion of virtual larvae in the study area that were started from each island, seamount, or island group. ... 41
Figure 3.12. Cumulative connectivity, 2004-2008. ... 43
Figure 3.13. Transport of virtual larvae from Swains Island by model year. ... 45
Figure 3.14. Position of virtual larvae from southern Savai'i for all model years by PLD... 46
Figure 3.15. External larval supply and local larval retention at Savai'i-South as a function of PLD and mortality rate. ... 47
Figure 3.16. Destinations (and sources) of simulated larvae originating from (arriving at) Savai'i-South for low, medium, and high larval mortality rates... 48
Figure 3.17. Position of virtual larvae from northern Savai'i for all model years by PLD. ... 50
Figure 3.18. External larval supply and local larval retention at Savai'i-North as a function of PLD and mortality rate... 51
Figure 3.19. Destinations (and sources) of simulated larvae originating from (arriving at) Savai'i-North for low, medium, and high larval mortality rates. ... 52
Figure 3.20. Position of virtual larvae from southern Upolu for all model years by PLD... 54
Figure 3.21. External larval supply and local larval retention at Upolu-South as a function of PLD and mortality rate. ... 55
Figure 3.22. Destinations (and sources) of simulated larvae originating from (arriving at) Upolu-South for low, medium, and high larval mortality rates. ... 56
Figure 3.23. Position of virtual larvae from northern Upolu for all model years by PLD... 58

List of Figures (cont.)

Figure 3.24. External larval supply and local larval retention at Upolu-North as a function of PLD and mortality rate. 59
Figure 3.25. Destinations (and sources) of simulated larvae originating from (arriving at) Upolu-North for low, medium, and high larval mortality rates. 60
Figure 3.26. Position of virtual larvae from Tutuila for all model years by PLD. 62
Figure 3.27. External larval supply and local larval retention at Tutuila as a function of PLD and mortality rate. 63
Figure 3.28. Destinations (and sources) of simulated larvae originating from (arriving at) Tutuila for low, medium, and high larval mortality rates. 64
Figure 3.29. Position of virtual larvae from South Bank for all model years by PLD. 66
Figure 3.30. External larval supply and local larval retention at South Bank as a function of PLD and mortality rate. 67
Figure 3.31. Destinations (and sources) of simulated larvae originating from (arriving at) South Bank for low, medium, and high larval mortality rates. 68
Figure 3.32. Position of virtual larvae from East Bank for all model years by PLD. 70
Figure 3.33. External larval supply and local larval retention at East Bank as a function of PLD and mortality rate. 71
Figure 3.34. Destinations (and sources) of simulated larvae originating from (arriving at) East Bank for low, medium, and high larval mortality rates. 72
Figure 3.35. Position of virtual larvae from Northeast Bank for all model years by PLD. 74
Figure 3.36. External larval supply and local larval retention at Northeast Bank as a function of PLD and mortality rate. 75
Figure 3.37. Destinations (and sources) of simulated larvae originating from (arriving at) Northeast Bank for low, medium, and high larval mortality rates. 76
Figure 3.38. Position of virtual larvae from Manu'a for all model years by PLD. 78
Figure 3.39. External larval supply and local larval retention at Manu'a as a function of PLD and mortality rate. 79
Figure 3.40. Destinations (and sources) of simulated larvae originating from (arriving at) Manu'a for low, medium, and high larval mortality rates. 80
Figure 3.41. Position of virtual larvae from Rose Atoll for all model years by PLD. 82
Figure 3.42. External larval supply and local larval retention at Rose Atoll as a function of PLD and mortality rate. 83
Figure 3.43. Destinations (and sources) of simulated larvae originating from (arriving at) Rose Atoll for low, medium, and high larval mortality rates. 84
Figure 3.44. Position of virtual larvae from Swains Island for all model years by PLD. 86
Figure 3.45. External larval supply and local larval retention at Swains Island as a function of PLD and mortality rate. 87
Figure 3.46. Destinations (and sources) of simulated larvae originating from (arriving at) Swains Island for low, medium, and high larval mortality rates. 88
Figure 4.1. Datasets and corresponding survey sites included in the analyses. 99
Figure 4.2. Biogeographic regions (Bioregions) assigned based on analyses of fish and coral data. 105
Figure 4.3. Coral cover at survey sites across Samoa and American Samoa. 106
Figure 4.4. Coral richness at survey sites across Samoa and American Samoa. 107
Figure 4.5. Summary of Bioregions sharing similar coral communities and those with unique coral communities as identified from the MDS analyses. 108
Figure 4.6. Fish biomass at survey sites across Samoa and American Samoa. 109
Figure 4.7. Fish richness at survey sites across Samoa and American Samoa. 111
Figure 4.8. Summary of Bioregions sharing similar fish communities and those with unique fish communities as identified from the MDS analyses. 112
Figure 4.9. Fish and coral hotspots by Bioregion. 114
Figure 5.1. Existing MPAs in American Samoa as of January 2011. 127
Figure 5.2. Density of pigs (pigs/km^2) in piggeries by watershed for Tutuila and Manu'a watersheds. 127
Figure 5.3. (a) Proportion of mapped benthic structure types in American Samoa overall. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 129
Figure 5.4. Benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within Alega Private Marine Reserve. 130
Figure 5.5. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in Alega Private Marine Reserve. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 131
Figure 5.6. Fish and coral data collected in Alega Private Marine Reserve. 131
Figure 5.7. Benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within the Alofau CFMP reserve. 132
Figure 5.8. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Alofau CFMP reserve. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 133
Figure 5.9. Fish and coral data collected in the Alofau CFMP reserve. 133
Figure 5.10. Benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within the Amanave CFMP reserve. 134

List of Figures (cont.)

Figure 5.11. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Amanave CFMP reserve. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 135
Figure 5.12. Fish and coral data collected in the Amanave CFMP reserve. 135
Figure 5.13. Benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within the Amaua and Auto CFMP reserve. 136
Figure 5.14. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Amaua and Auto CFMP reserve. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 137
Figure 5.15. Fish and coral data collected in the Amaua and Auto CFMP reserve. 137
Figure 5.16. Benthic habitat (by structure type) within the Aoa CFMP reserve. 138
Figure 5.17. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Aoa CFMP reserve. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 139
Figure 5.18. Benthic habitat (by structure type) within the Aua CFMP reserve. 140
Figure 5.19. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Aua CFMP reserve. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 141
Figure 5.20. Benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within the Fagamalo CFMP reserve. 142
Figure 5.21. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Fagamalo CFMP reserve. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 143
Figure 5.22. Fish and coral data collected in the Fagamalo CFMP reserve. 143
Figure 5.23. Benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within the Fagamalo No-Take MPA..... 144
Figure 5.24. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Fagamalo No-Take MPA. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 145
Figure 5.25. Comparison of fish and coral data collected in the Fagamalo No-Take MPA to data from all of American Samoa. 145
Figure 5.26. Benthic habitat (by structure type) within the Leone Pala SMA. 146
Figure 5.27. Proportion of benthic structure types in the Leone Pala SMA. 147
Figure 5.28. Benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within the Masausi CFMP reserve. 148
Figure 5.29. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Masausi CFMP reserve. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 149
Figure 5.30. Fish and coral data collected in the Masausi CFMP reserve. 149
Figure 5.31. Benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within the Matu'u and Faganeanea CFMP reserve. 150
Figure 5.32. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Matu'u and Faganeanea CFMP reserve. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 151
Figure 5.33. Fish and coral data collected in the Matu'u and Faganeanea CFMP reserve. 151
Figure 5.34. Benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within the Nu'uuli Pala SMA. 152
Figure 5.35. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Nu'uuli Pala SMA. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 153
Figure 5.36. Benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within the Ofu Vaoto Marine Park.... 154
Figure 5.37. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Ofu Vaoto Marine Park. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 155
Figure 5.38. Fish and coral data collected in the Ofu Vaoto Marine Park. 155
Figure 5.39. Benthic habitat (by structure type) within the Pago Pago Harbor SMA. 156
Figure 5.40. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Pago Pago Harbor SMA. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 157
Figure 5.41. Benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within the Poloa CFMP reserve..... 158
Figure 5.42. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Poloa CFMP reserve. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 159
Figure 5.43. Fish and coral data collected in the Poloa CFMP reserve. 159
Figure 5.44. Benthic habitat (by structure type) within the Sailele CFMP reserve. 160
Figure 5.45. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Sailele CFMP reserve. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 161
Figure 5.46. Benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within the Vatia CFMP reserve. 162
Figure 5.47. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Vatia CFMP reserve. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 163
Figure 5.48. Fish and coral data collected in the Vatia CFMP reserve. 163
Figure 5.49. Benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within Fagatele Bay NMS. 164
Figure 5.50. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in Fagatele Bay NMS. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 165

List of Figures (cont.)

Figure 5.51. Comparison of fish and coral data collected in Fagatele Bay NMS to data from all of American Samoa. . 165
Figure 5.52. Benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within the Ofu Unit of the National Park. 166
Figure 5.53. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Ofu Unit of the National Park. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 167
Figure 5.54. Comparison of fish and coral data collected in the Ofu Unit of the National Park to data from all of American Samoa..... 167
Figure 5.55. Benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within the Ta'u Unit of the National Park. . 168
Figure 5.56. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Ta'u Unit of the National Park. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 169
Figure 5.57. Comparison of fish and coral data collected in the Ta'u Unit of the National Park to data from all of American Samoa..... 169
Figure 5.58. Benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within the Tutuila Unit of the National Park. 170
Figure 5.59. (a) Proportion of benthic structure types in the Tutuila Unit of the National Park. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 171
Figure 5.60. Comparison of fish and coral data collected in the Tutuila Unit of the National Park to data from all of American Samoa. 171
Figure 5.61. Mapped benthic habitat (by structure type) and fish and coral survey data within Rose Atoll MNM..... 172
Figure 5.62. (a) Proportion of mapped benthic structure types in Rose Atoll MNM. (b) Proportion of coral reef and hardbottom in each reef zone. 173
Figure 5.63. Comparison of fish and coral data collected in the Rose Atoll MNM to data from all of American Samoa. 173
Figure 5.64. (a) Proportion of the total potential reef ecosystem area around American Samoa by benthic structure type for the entire suite of existing MPAs and for the rest of American Samoa. (b) Proportion of the total potential reef ecosystem with no-take restrictions and with other fishing restrictions. 174
Figure 5.65. (a) Proportion of coral reef habitat by benthic structure type for the entire suite of existing MPAs and for the rest of American Samoa. (b) Proportion of coral reef habitat with no-take restrictions and with other fishing restrictions..... 175
Figure 5.66. Distribution of existing MPAs relative to the locations of significant ecological features, including Bioregions that are hotspots for three fish/coral variables (Chapter 4) and the mesophotic coral banks surrounding Tutuila (Appendix B). 177
Figure 5.67. Proportion of potential reef ecosystem area by benthic structure type for each existing MPA. 178
Figure A.1. Seamounts of the Samoan Exclusive Economic Zones. 189
Figure A.2. Frequency distribution of seamounts within the Samoan and American Samoan EEZ based on a) depth of seamount top and b) height. 190
Figure A.3. Vailulu'u Seamount, the active hotspot for the Samoan Island Chain. 191
Figure A.4. Papatua Guyot (South Bank). 191
Figure A.5. Tulaga (East Bank). 192
Figure A.6. Muli Guyot (NE Bank). 192
Figure A.7. Pasco Seamount..... 192
Figure A.8. Toafilemu Seamount. 192
Figure B.1. Cross section of Zones. 198
Figures C.1-31. Bar graphs depicting the distribution of percent coral cover (C.1-8), coral richness (C.9-15), fish biomass (C.16-23), and fish richness (C.24-31) for each of the studies. 205
Figure C.32. MDS plots based on coral community data for sites in each of the American Samoa studies. 221
Figure C.33. MDS plots based on fish community data for sites in each of the American Samoa studies..... 222
Figure C.34. MDS plots based on coral and fish community data for sites in each of the Samoa studies..... 223