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NOAA Workshop for PRIA Wraps Up with Optimism for Collaboration and Understanding

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The NOAA Workshop for the Pacific Remote Islands Area (PRIA) successfully concluded on September 13, 2023, bringing together two days of insightful discussions and community engagement. Hosted in American Samoa at the Rex H. Lee Auditorium in Utulei, the workshop provided a platform for diverse stakeholders to share their perspectives on the proposed National Marine Sanctuary designation for the Pacific Remote Islands.

The workshop's closure was marked by the poignant closing remarks of Lieutenant Governor Talauega E. V. Ale. He extended his heartfelt appreciation to the federal partners involved, notably acknowledging NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (NMS) Director John Armor, Acting Director Sarah Malloy of the NOAA Pacific Islands Regional Office, and the

entire NOAA staff who traveled to American Samoa. He also recognized the efforts of NOAA Superintendent for NMS of American Samoa Atuatasi Lelei Peau, Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources Director Taotasi Archie Soliai, and the team at ASG for their impeccable coordination of the event, ensuring that this vital conversation could take place.

Reflecting on the workshop's significance, Lieutenant Governor Talauega expressed his hope that all participants left with a better understanding of the potential effects of the sanctuary designation. He emphasized the importance of this understanding for American Samoa, noting that it goes beyond economics and extends to the preservation of the Samoan people as a fishing community. "The importance of the tuna industry in American Samoa and our local cannery cannot be overstated," stated the Lieutenant Governor. "It is the pillar of our economy, it is the employer of thousands, and it is what feeds our families. Any action that threatens the survival of the fishing industry threatens the survival of our fragile economy," he further added.

Lieutenant Governor Talauega expressed appreciation for the conservation efforts being made in the Pacific and highlighted the value of the natural marine resources of the territory. Lieutenant Governor Talauega further remarked, "I have confidence in finding a solution that would ensure the preservation of oceans without crippling the fishing industry, the economy, and the unique culture of American Samoa."

As a concrete demonstration of their commitment, Lieutenant Governor Talauega announced that the American Samoa Government would be submitting a letter summarizing the workshop's discussions and reiterating their opposition to further restrictions on commercial fishing in the PRIA region.

In closing, Lieutenant Governor Talauega expressed his belief that a "happy medium" could be found, where both conservation and utilization coexist harmoniously. "We hope that when you go back to Washington D.C., and explain to them that they can find a way where environmentalists and us here in American Samoa can both get what we want," concluded Lieutenant Governor Talauega.

Later in the evening, Governor Lemanu P. S. Mauga and First Lady Ella hosted an appreciation dinner for the NOAA Officials at the Mauga o Alii Governor's Mansion. The First Lady presented parting gifts for each of the guests. Governor Lemanu conveyed his appreciation to the NOAA team in his final remarks: "We are proud to welcome you to American Samoa, and I commend your dedication, and appreciate your commitment to this important dialogue. Together, we can find solutions that safeguard our environment and support our communities. Thank you for coming to our territory."

The conclusion of the workshop leaves a sense of optimism for continued collaboration and understanding regarding marine conservation in the Pacific Remote Islands Area.

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