

# HIGH CHIEF TAULAPAPA WILLIAM SWORD



*Learn about the people who balance competing interests while trying to make fishery management decisions for the overall benefit of the nation.*

High Chief Taulapapa William Sword, Council vice chair for American Samoa, has been a Council member for a combined time of more than 10 years, five as vice chair. He also served on the Council's American Samoa Advisory Panel as vice chair for 6+ years. He has worked for 30+ years as a manager and civil engineer for an oil company that provides and stores oil for the territory. He is an avid recreational fisherman with more than 50 years of experience, most recently winning three of seven species categories in a 2021 sport fishing tournament. He serves as vice chair on the Marine Railway Board which services the fishing fleets in American Samoa. He has also been the International Game Fish Association representative in the territory for more than 10 years.

## **You've been with the Council for a long time. Why did you initially want to be part of it?**

The Council offers a very strong and unique forum from which we can help our fishermen continue to practice sustainable fishing. I got interested in the Council because conservation of resources is important, but difficult when rogue nations do not want to conform to conservation guidelines and at the same time, ultra-conservative NGOs refuse to allow fishing in our waters, thus depriving our fishermen of the chance to monitor and better conserve our resources. Foreign fleets report nothing. However, what little we can do to preserve our fisheries through the Council process is of vital importance.

One other objective is to promote proper use of our resources, rather than let distant-water fleets ravage our fisheries at the expense of our Pacific peoples. Too many conservationists cannot see the forest for the trees and unknowingly prevent our fishermen from fishing. Our fishermen are the best persons to monitor fishing within our exclusive economic zone (EEZ) so the Council can make sustainable fishing policies. They report and are a lot more honest than foreign fishing fleets.

## **How does your position as a High Chief in the Samoan community help you to bring a different perspective to fishery management in the Western Pacific?**

Samoans are an anomaly—our Fa'a Samoa is a democracy with a smidgen of socialism—so our society depends on everyone's involvement and it is a way

of life to have empathy with people in your village. What a fisherman catches is shared with family, friends and community. Our culture and people grew up with the land and the sea as a resource from which we derive sustenance, so we have to practice conservation in all aspects of our interaction with nature. In Samoa, we have "a'au e sa le fagota" or no fishing areas for a while, but we open it up after the area has recovered sufficiently. The job of the Chief is to lead, to speak and to guide the village in its efforts to help the community. The Council is my family and village, and I am responsible for the sustainable use of our fisheries. You cannot use the word sustainable if you have areas which are never fished at all.

## **What are some challenges that American Samoa fisheries are facing?**

Our livelihood and our economy in American Samoa are dependent on the fishing industry. In the last decade, we have seen a near disastrous failure of our national fishery leaders to support the last remaining tuna cannery in the United States. They do not protect the purse seine and longline fleets which supply U.S.-caught fish for our cannery. So the challenge is to get our federal government to hear our Pacific voices, and to recognize the danger that they pose to our territory and hopefully get them to reverse course on their economically destructive policies.

American Samoa is the fifth largest producer of processed fish in the United States and Territories. With our purse seine fleet being reduced from more than 40 boats to 11 boats in the past decade, we see the imminent demise of this fishery. Yet the foreign fishing fleets, from

China especially, continue to ravage the fisheries in our EEZ and sell our fish back to us. For sure, federal fisheries officials are becoming the laughing stock of the Asia-Pacific fishing countries and need to show more equity and environmental justice for our fishing community. It would certainly bode well, and change neighbors' attitudes, if our fishery policies would support U.S. fishing communities in the South Pacific as they do the small island developing states countries. Actions speak louder than words, and actions indicate our federal fisheries managers do not listen or support our fishing communities. Hopefully my input will make them realize their folly.

## **What does effective fishery management look like to you?**

Conservation and proper use of our resources, not to throw it away or give it away to other countries as the federal government has done in the last decade or so. We need to monitor our fishing effort and make sure we are using the resources in our EEZ in a prudent, sustainable and advantageous manner to meet the national interests (and American Samoa interests) rather than squander it to predator nations. We have the most responsible fishermen in the world and they are the best folks to monitor our use of our fishing resources in order to manage all the fisheries as per the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The Council does a great job at effectively managing fishing in federal waters so they are sustainable.

## **Lastly, what is your favorite fish to eat?**

For reef fish, it is the pink snapper (onaga, *palu malau*), and for pelagics it would be *masimasi* (dolphinfish) and yellowfin tuna. 🐟