



**Marianas Archipelago Synopsis
159th Council Meeting
Saipan, CNMI
Fiesta Resort and Spa Hotel
March 17 – 18, 2014**

Synopsis of Information and Issues for the Marianas Archipelago –Part 1: CNMI

A. Arongal Falúw/Gasetan Tano (Island Area Reports)

The Council will be updated on fishery and agency activities that have taken place in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands since the last Council meeting.

B. Legislative Report

The Council will hear reports on the following legislations and resolutions:

1. Governor Eloy Inos signed Rep. Teresita Santos' (R-Rota) House Bill 18-106, House Draft 1 or a fishing bill into Public Law 18-32 on January 10, 2014. The new law is applicable only in Rota. The new law authorizes the use of one-half-inch net mesh to catch bigeye scad or *atulai*, as well as allows net fishing for goat fish or *tiao* during their seasonal run on Rota. The type of nets allowed are the three types of *Chenchulu*, namely *Chenchulun lagua* or drag net, *Chenchulun umesugon* or surround nets, and *Chenchulun managam* or trap nets. The use of these nets shall be legal in the waters surrounding Rota when used for non-commercial purposes to catch *atulai* and *tiao* during their seasonal runs.
2. Senate Resolution 18-23 was also adopted on January 14, 2014, which urged the U.S. President to delay the proclamation on submerged lands for 180 days to allow the CNMI and the federal governments to develop a co-management plan. The request was not considered.
3. House Joint Resolution 18-14. Introduced by Speaker Joseph Deleon Guerrero on January 27, 2014, the resolution is requesting Governor Inos to oppose any and all proposed military use of the island of Pagan and oppose any increase in military activities in the Northern Islands. The House Committee on Federal and Foreign Affairs is conducting community hearings to solicit public input on this resolution.
4. 200 Miles EEZ. The House of Representative, by a vote of 19-1, also adopted Rep. Felicidad Ogumoro's House Joint Resolution 18-1, requesting and urging Congress "to recognize the longstanding ancestral rights of persons of Northern Marianas descent with

respect to their ownership of the submerged lands of the Northern Marianas Islands and its adjacent waters”.

C. Enforcement Issues

The Council will hear reports on local enforcement activities and violations occurring in the Northern Mariana Islands since the last Council meeting.

D. Marianas Trench Marine National Monument

The Council will hear reports pertaining to the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument in the CNMI.

1. Marianas Trench Monument Update

- a. Visitor Center Working Group. During their meeting last September, the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument Advisory Council established a working group to coordinate plans for the development of a Visitor Center for the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument. Council member and Department of Lands and Natural Resources Secretary Arnold Palacios was elected as the working group’s Chairman.

The working group is comprised of representatives from various government agencies and non-government organizations. The working group is tasked with providing recommendations and alternative plans for the design, acquisition, and operation of the Visitor Center. The members are all volunteers and have signed up to be members of either one or more subcommittees, which include: Finance, Program, Interagency, Site and Ad-Hoc.

Since they’re creation, the different subcommittees have been meeting and reporting their progress and findings during the working group meetings. They also planned to conduct community “listening sessions”, which will be considered in adopting recommendations for the visitor center. They will also prepare a status update of the Working Group for the chairman to report during the next Advisory Council meeting.

- b. Monument’s Co-Management Plan. In light of the recent proclamation by President Obama to withhold temporarily submerged lands and waters around Tinian, FDM and the three islands unit of the marine monument until a co-management plan is developed, Governor Inos has tasked his legal counsel to work with CNMI members of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument Advisory Council and their federal counterparts to develop the plan as soon as possible.

2. Presidential Proclamation regarding Northern Islands, Tinian and FDM

President Obama issued a proclamation on January 16, 2014, which withheld the transfer to the CNMI the control of submerged lands around the island of Tinian, Farallon de Medinilla (FDM), and the three island units within the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, which includes Asuncion, Maug, and Uracus. The submerged lands around these islands are on hold until a co-management plan with respect to the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument is completed.

Earlier the president signed S. 256 into Public Law 113-34, which gave the CNMI its territorial waters from 0 to 3 nautical miles around the islands. The proclamation was

issued before the end of the 120 days included in the law for the president to exempt from the transfer of submerged lands for federal use.

The CNMI leaders were concerned and responded in different ways. Governor Inos wrote President Obama to include a provision requiring both parties to reach agreements concerning military and a co-management plan within one hundred eighty days of the signing of the proclamation and to include mutually agreeable process should negotiations reach an impasse.

The Senate also adopted Senate Resolution 18-23 urging the President to delay the proclamation of submerged lands and to include the CNMI government and the CNMI Delegate to the United States in the discussion pertaining to submerged lands through Section 902 of the Covenant agreement.

House Speaker Joseph Deleon Guerrero also wrote President Obama requesting that the final Proclamation include language that 1) sets a procedure for resolving disputes in the event that a mutual resolution is not reached between the CNMI and relevant federal departments and 2) sets deadline for reaching agreements regarding the conveyance of the lands at issue.

E. Bottomfish Area Closure Modification (Action Item)

The Council will be considering a measure to reduce the 50 nautical mile area closure for vessels longer than 40 feet targeting bottomfish fishing around the southern Islands of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The intent of the action is to reduce economic and social impacts to the local bottomfish fishing fleet while increasing efficiency and performance of the fishery. The need for this measure has been expressed by the local CNMI bottomfish fishermen and Council advisors who claim that the initial intent of the closure has not been realized as large vessels operated by non-residents have not entered the fishery impacting the small trailer boat fleet. The three options being consider include:

- 1) No Action – regain the 50 mile closure around the CNMI Southern Islands – Rota, Saipan, Tinian and FDM (Southern Islands) – for vessels over 40 feet in length. Other provisions
- 2) Reduce the 50 mile closure to 30 miles for large vessels around the CNMI southern Islands.
- 3) Remove the 50 mile large vessel closure around the CNMI southern islands.

The Council may take action on this issue at its 159th Meeting and make a preliminary recommendation on these or other options identified at the meeting.

F. Report on CNMI Projects

The Council will hear reports on projects ongoing regarding fisheries in the CNMI, including, amongst others, data collection efforts and rabbitfish aquaculture. On 11/28/2012 former Governor Benigno Fitial signed HB 17-282 into law becoming PL 17-89. This amended 2 CMC §5104, establishing a mandatory catch recording and reporting system for the CNMI. PL 17-89 requires any individual or business engaged in the commercial harvest or purchase of fish products to report all catch/purchase information to DFW. Currently DFW collects voluntary commercial catch information from fish vendors, restaurants and hotels. Not all businesses participate and provide catch information to DFW. The Council provided some funding to DFW

to help implement PL 17-89. DFW plans to conduct workshops and trainings with fishermen and businesses who commercially harvest/purchase fish within the CNMI. DFW staff will also be available to help fishermen and businesses with the filling out of the required forms and with fish identifications. Benefits of PL 17-89 include having improved participation from fishermen and businesses and improved accuracy of data collected. DFW is currently drafting regulations and penalties, planning village meetings and reviewing forms for potential consolidation.

In April of 2011, the Northern Marianas College's Cooperative Research, Extension, and Education Service (NMC CREES) completed the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Aquaculture, 5-year, Strategic Development Plan, 2011-2015, as mandated by CNMI Public Law 15-43. In the plan, marine finfish was identified as one of five aquatic organisms targeted for development to expand and diversify the type of species currently cultured away from marine shrimp and Tilapia. In July of 2012, a meeting was convened to seek input and consensus from stakeholders on a specific marine finfish species in which they wish to see research and development efforts focus on for the next few years. Rabbitfish or *Siganus spp* was overwhelmingly selected by those present as the marine finfish species with the most potential for success from farm to market. As a result, NMC CREES submitted a proposal to the Marine Conservation Plan (MCP) advisory council for funding to pursue and realize the aspirations of the people of the commonwealth for marine finfish production for livelihood, food security, and environmental stewardship. It is the intent of this project, then; to close the life cycle of *Siganus argenteus*, an indigenous Rabbitfish species, and allow captive seedstocks production, which will make juveniles readily available locally for distribution to aquaculture producers. By culturing Rabbitfish, CNMI producers, have opportunities to grow out the juveniles to market size for eating or they can process the Rabbitfish, month-old fry as a value added product. Because the seedstocks are produced locally, producers save on transportation cost and prevent the accidental introduction of invasive species or deadly pathogens from importation of similar species.

G. Community Activities and Issues

The Council will hear reports pertaining to the military buildup in the Marianas, particularly in the CNMI.

H. Education and Outreach Initiatives

The Council will be updated on education and outreach projects and programs being implemented. The 2014 Chamorro and Refaluwasch Lunar Calendars have been published and continue to be distributed to government offices, schools and the community, especially to the fishermen. The calendars contain winning art works from students from kindergarten to high school in both private and public schools. The theme for this year's poster contest was "Climate Change and Traditional Places: Rights and Responsibilities". The twelve winning posters were submitted by students attending Grace Christian Academy on Saipan and Sinapalo Elementary School on Rota. The winners from each island will receive their prizes, along with copies of the calendars which features their winning posters.

The inclusion of local names for the moon phases, fishes, and seasonal runs, as well as the tide chart, are very popular among the indigenous people, especially fishermen.

I. Advisory Group Recommendations

The Council will be provided reports of the Marianas Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan Advisory Panel and Plan Team Meetings as well as the CNMI Regional Ecosystem Advisory

Committee Meeting held prior to the Council Meeting. These reports may contain recommendations to the Council that they may consider for action at the 159th Meeting.

J. SSC Recommendations

The Council will review the SSC's recommendations regarding Mariana Archipelago issues made at the 115th SSC Meeting held in Honolulu, Hawaii.