



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

202nd Meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council

Report on the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' Arongol Falú

CNMI Council member Gene Weaver will provide updates within the CNMI, specifically in relation to community updates.

Fluctuating Fuel and Diesel Prices

Fuel prices have been fluctuating back and forth, ten cents at a time, within the last quarter. Currently fuel prices per gallon on Saipan is \$5.16, on Tinian is \$7.10 and on Rota is \$6.54. Diesel prices per gallon have also fluctuated and are currently \$5.38 on Saipan, \$7.48 on Tinian and \$9.92 on Rota. These prices pose challenges to the local fishers.

Air Cabotage Reform

U.S. Congresswoman Kimberlyn King-Hinds of the CNMI has joined U.S. Congressman James Moylan of Guam in urging U.S. Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy to support H.R. 1536, the Pacific Flight Alternatives Act. This legislation seeks to allow air cabotage for Philippine, South Korean, and Japanese air carriers operating in Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands.

In June 2024, Delegate Moylan introduced H.R. 8786, which proposes a special cabotage exemption for foreign carriers to operate between Guam and other U.S. ports. The initiative aims to increase competition and reduce airfare costs.

Additionally, in August 2024, Delegate Moylan advocated for including the Guam-CNMI route in the Essential Air Service (EAS) program, a federal subsidy initiative supporting air services to rural communities. If implemented, this could help lower the nearly \$500 round-trip airfare between Guam and the CNMI.

High airfare costs between Guam and the CNMI continue to impact residents and hinder tourism, a vital economic sector for both territories. Lowering these costs would also benefit military personnel stationed in the region, improving their quality of life and facilitating travel for both personal and official purposes.

By pursuing air cabotage reform and securing federal subsidies through the EAS program, Delegates Moylan and King-Hinds aim to make air travel more affordable and accessible, benefiting residents, tourists, and the military community in the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam.

COTA launches feasibility study for inter-island ferry service and transportation master plan

The Commonwealth Office of Transit Authority (COTA) has initiated a feasibility study to assess the potential for an inter-island ferry service and to develop a comprehensive transportation master plan for the Northern Mariana Islands. This initiative aims to enhance connectivity between the islands, improve transportation infrastructure, and boost economic development.

This initiative underscores COTA's commitment to improving transportation infrastructure and services in the Northern Mariana Islands, aiming to enhance quality of life and support sustainable economic growth.

PIFSC Mariana Fisher's Engagement Meeting

The recent PIFSC Mariana Fisher's Engagement Meeting saw strong community participation, with a great turnout from the community and agencies/organization's outreach booths. The event featured informative presentations from the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) and the CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW).

Community members provided valuable feedback, which PIFSC representatives will discuss in greater detail later in the agenda.

Advisory Panel, Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee, and Inflation Reduction Act Meetings

The Advisory Panel (AP) meeting was held on February 26, 2025 and had attracted public participation, leading to productive discussions on various fishery-related issues.

Mark Cruz provided updates on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Military and the CNMI Commonwealth Port Authority, along with the status of prepositioned ships anchoring near Saipan. These discussions led to recommendations that will be reviewed later in the agenda.

The Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee (REAC) meeting was held the following morning. Although no REAC meeting took place in 2023, this session followed up on previous recommendations from 2023 while introducing new ones, which Vice-Chair Sylvan Igisomar will elaborate on later.

The Saipan Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) meeting took place on the evening of February 27, 2025, with over 30 attendees engaging in a roundtable discussion. Participants had the opportunity to voice concerns and challenges in the fishing community with Pacific Islands Fisheries Group (PIFG) staff, Council staff, and DFW staff present. Further discussions will take place as the agenda progresses.

Tournament Update

The 6th Annual Wahoo in the Marianas hosted by Tasi To Table (TTT) was the only fishing tournament that took place during this first quarter. 28 boats registered for the event and a total of 68 wahoo were weighed. The third place wahoo weighed in at 32.8 pounds, second place weighed in at 33.0 pounds and the winner of the tournament was 38.8 pounds. Total weight was determined by weighing 3 non-placing wahoos for a combined total of the winning team weighing in at 85.1 pounds.

CNMI Council member Pedro Itibus will provide updates within the CNMI in regard to the economy in the past quarter in relation to tourism.

DFS T Galleria Closure

DFS T Galleria has announced its closure, effective April 30, 2025. The company cited challenging economic conditions and a global restructuring strategy as primary factors for the decision of the closure. The closure will have a significant effect on Saipan's economy, as DFS has been a major tourist attraction for many years.

Korean Tourism Market

South Korea remains the primary tourism market for the CNMI. Recently, E-Land, a South Korean conglomerate, hosted members of the Korean media in the Northern Mariana Islands to promote tourism. The initiative aims to highlight the NMI's attractions and strengthen tourism ties between the two regions.

According to the Marianas Visitors Authority (MVA), arrivals to Saipan, Tinian, and Rota saw a 26% decline in January 2025, with only 17,744 visitors, compared to 23,840 visitors in January 2024.

King-Hinds' Appeal for U.S. Assistance in Tourism Reboot

Congresswoman Kimberlyn King-Hinds has called for U.S. assistance to revitalize the CNMI's tourism industry, which has struggled in recent years. King-Hinds emphasized the importance of improving infrastructure and strategic marketing to attract visitors back to the islands. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected tourism in the CNMI, leading to economic challenges and a decline in visitor numbers. Tourism plays a crucial role in the CNMI's economy, providing employment opportunities and supporting local businesses.

Both tourism and fisheries are essential to the CNMI's economic stability. A strong tourism industry can drive higher demand for local seafood, benefiting fishermen and related businesses. Integrating fisheries into tourism—such as through fishing tours and seafood festivals—could enhance the visitor experience and promote the CNMI's cultural heritage. Historically, when the tourism industry flourished in the CNMI, commercial fishing was also at its peak.

By addressing challenges in air travel, infrastructure, and marketing, alongside fostering synergies between tourism and fisheries, leaders in the CNMI aim to rebuild a resilient and thriving economy.