



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

**206th 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 community updates in the CNMI.

Tournament Update

The Tinian Fishermen’s Association, in partnership with the Tinian Mayor’s Office, hosted its 4th Annual Wahoo Fishing Derby on February 14, 2026, as part of the 22nd Annual Tinian Hot Pepper/Pika Festival. The derby was held at the Jose P. San Nicolas Commercial Port, which had celebrated the ribbon-cutting ceremony for its newly installed floating docks the day prior. The event also marked one of the first community fishing activities to utilize the new port improvements, highlighting continued investments in local marine infrastructure that support the fishing community. The event took place from 6:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with 20 boats participating from the islands of Tinian and Saipan. Although fishing conditions proved challenging, the derby concluded with four wahoo landed by three teams, demonstrating the persistence and skill of participating fishers.

Third place was awarded to Team Coke with a 13-pound wahoo. Second place went to Team Home Grown, captained by Advisory Panel member Dre Lizama. Captain Lizama had returned to Tinian earlier that afternoon after attending a shark depredation workshop in Honolulu, quickly launching his vessel by 1:00 p.m. and successfully landing two wahoo, including a 14-pound catch. First place was claimed by Team Agaga with an 18-pound wahoo. “*Agaga*,” a Chamorro family clan name meaning “red,” fittingly captured the spirit of the day. With the derby held during the Hot Pepper/*Pika* (spicy) Festival—where spicy red peppers are a central theme—and coinciding with Valentine’s Day, the moment made for a memorable and festive victory for the team.

The derby continues to grow as a celebrated community event, bringing together fishers from across the islands while promoting local fishing traditions, strengthening community ties, and highlighting the importance of fisheries within the culture and economy of the CNMI.

Promoting Locally Caught Seafood

A recent community initiative supporting local fishers and strengthening direct seafood access within the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands was launched this quarter by the CNMI Indigenous Affairs Office through its Friday Fish Fry Night Market. The events were held on March 6 and March 20, 2026, from 3:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the Garapan Fishing Base to promote locally caught seafood and provide economic opportunities for fishers and farmers.

The market encourages local fish vendors to sell their catch directly to the community, while food vendors prepare and cook freshly purchased fish on-site for attendees. In addition to supporting the sale of locally caught seafood, the event also provides opportunities for local arts and crafts vendors and features live entertainment for families. The initiative highlights the important role that community markets can play in supporting small-scale fisheries, strengthening local food systems, and celebrating the cultural connections between fishing and community life in the CNMI.

Fuel Prices and Operational Costs for Local Fishers

Rising fuel prices continue to place increasing pressure on the fishing sector in the CNMI. Higher fuel costs directly increase the operational expenses for small-boat fishers, which may reduce fishing effort, limit trip frequency, and affect participation in both commercial and subsistence fishing activities. In March alone, fuel prices increased three times across the islands. Current estimates place fuel at approximately \$6.00 per gallon on Saipan, about \$7.00 per gallon on Rota, and roughly \$8.00 per gallon on Tinian, further highlighting the cost challenges faced by fishers throughout the CNMI.

Weather Events and Safety Considerations for the Fishing Community

Recent flash flood events and weather advisories across the Marianas have affected several communities. These conditions may impact harbor access, shoreline infrastructure, and the ability of small-boat fishers to safely conduct fishing activities. Weather-related disruptions may also affect the scheduling of fishing tournaments and other fisheries-related community gatherings.

CNMI Council member Pedro Itibus will provide updates on the CNMI government.

Department of Public Safety Service Fees and Implications for Marine Events

The CNMI Department of Public Safety (DPS) recently implemented service fees for activities determined not to be part of its essential law enforcement responsibilities under Public Law 14-77 Public Safety Enactment Act of 2005. The fee schedule took effect on March 8, 2026. Several of these new fees may have direct implications for fisheries-related events and activities. For example, towing of privately owned boats is now subject to a \$300 fee, which may affect

fishers who require assistance with disabled vessels. In addition, special events requesting officer presence—such as traffic control, security, or escorts—will be charged at \$65 per hour per officer. This may increase costs for community fishing derbies, tournaments, and outreach events that rely on DPS support for public safety. Marine events will also now require a \$200 permit fee per event, which may affect the planning and budgeting of fishing tournaments and other ocean-based community events that are common within the local fishing community.

Proposed Legislation to Provide Tax Relief for Small Businesses

Recent legislative discussions aimed at reducing the tax burden on small businesses. Members of the CNMI House of Representatives are currently reviewing two proposed measures intended to provide relief and improve economic opportunities for small businesses and local producers.

One proposal, House Bill 24-95, seeks to create additional gross revenue tax exemptions, clarify export treatment, and simplify certain aspects of tax administration. Another measure, House Bill 24-98, would provide tax relief for businesses operating at a net loss under the Northern Mariana Islands Territorial Income Tax.

These proposals are intended to help small businesses remain viable during challenging economic conditions and reduce the likelihood of business closures. If enacted, such measures may also benefit sectors connected to fisheries, including seafood vendors, fish markets, tackle shops, boat operators, and other small businesses that support the local fishing economy. The bills are currently under review as lawmakers seek additional input from government agencies and the business community.

Federal Legislation Expanding Education Opportunities for Territorial Students

At the federal level, the United States House of Representatives recently passed bipartisan legislation that would guarantee in-state tuition rates for students from U.S. territories, including the CNMI, when attending public colleges and universities in the United States. Expanded access to higher education may benefit the territory's fishing communities by supporting workforce development and increasing opportunities for local students interested in fields related to fisheries management, marine science, and maritime industries.