



WESTERN  
PACIFIC  
REGIONAL  
FISHERY  
MANAGEMENT  
COUNCIL

## **201<sup>st</sup> 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 an update with highlights in the CNMI which includes media, economy and tourism, Council member training and fishing tournaments within the previous quarter.

Saipan Tribune, a newspaper that has been in operation since 1990, has decided to transition to a fully digital platform, embracing an entirely online format in January 2025. Shifting towards a completely digital outlook allows for a broader reach in audience, real-time updates, interactive features, search ability and archiving, portability and sustainability. On the other hand, the decision may cause a digital divide with individuals who are not as tech savvy or do not have internet access.

The Hotel Association of the Northern Mariana Islands has (HANMI) has announced that tourism has remained at 43%, displaying no growth since the last quarter.

The Hyatt Regency Saipan has been closed since June 2024 and is now under new management by Sheraton. The property has officially reopened as Marianas Beach Resort on November 25, 2024.

With over 30 years of service in the CNMI, Micronesia Air Connection Services (MACS) is exploring the opportunity to provide island air services for Saipan, Tinian, Rota, and potentially Guam. The company has submitted an application for a qualifying certificate with the Commonwealth Economic Development Authority (CEDA), seeking exemption from individual business income tax and business gross revenue tax for a period of over 25 years. If approved, MACS plans to launch regular inter-island air service as early as December 2024.

Council member training has been completed by Gene Weaver which was held on October 29-31, 2024 in Silver springs, Maryland.

Two fishing tournaments occurred during this quarter. One was held on October 12 & 13, 2024 on Luta (Rota), which was the Bisita Luta/Budweiser Fishing Derby with 19 participants. The winning marlin weight was 114 lbs. Ping and Juan's Coconut Classic Fishing Derby was

held on October 20, 2024 on Saipan/Managaha. This derby was targeted towards the youth of the CNMI and the winner was determined by the longest catch. Youth were invited to participate and bring their bentos to be shared on Managaha, where the winners were announced and given decorated coconuts as prizes.

CNMI Council member Pedro Itibus will report on fisher's observations on shark depredation and its effects to the fishing community and the recent election results.

Fishers have been reporting an increase in shark depredation leading towards the end of this year. Shark depredation has been increasing in recent years and affecting the lives of both commercial and recreational fishers. This issue is affecting a wide range of fishing methods, including pelagic fishers, bottom fishers, and spear fishers. Many fishers are experiencing coming back in from a fishing trip with little to no fish, despite their efforts. This causes hardships as fuel prices are high in the CNMI and commercial fishers are not making enough money to cover fuel expenses and recreational fishers lose out on having a few meals. Spear fishers are particularly vulnerable as they come in close contact with these sharks, risking their lives for their livelihood. As shark populations grow and their hunting areas overlap with fishing zones, depredation has become a significant challenge across various fishing sectors.

Kimberlyn King-Hinds is the delegate-elect to the United States House of Representatives from the Northern Mariana Island's at-large congressional district and will be assuming office on January 3, 2025. King-Hinds aims to first prioritize restoring the tourism industry in the CNMI.

CNMI Council member/Department of Lands and Natural Resources Secretary, Sylvan Igisomar will provide updates on the Sustainable Fisheries Fund grants in the CNMI.

The department is currently in the process of recruiting a qualified MCP Coordinator to spearhead the current and upcoming SFF sub-grants. Currently, the DLNR Special Assistant, Cameron Nicholas, is taking on tasks until such position will be filled. The SFF 12 sub-grant is currently open and has been approved for an extension, with a new close date set for July 30, 2025. The SFF 13 sub-grant is in the process towards completion with a close date of July 31, 2025.