

## 201<sup>st</sup> Council Meeting Guam Council Members Isla Informe'

**Guam Council Vice Chair Judith Guthertz**



**Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz Firing Range Target**

The Council's Marianas Military Buildup Working Group remains committed to collaborating with stakeholders to address the concerns of the fishing communities in Guam and the CNMI.

A comprehensive list of recommendations for the U.S. Department of Defense has been developed and endorsed by the Advisory Panel and Council members. These recommendations aim to mitigate the anticipated impacts of

the significant increase in military personnel, their families, and civilian contractors on the region's fisheries and fishing infrastructure.

The group is actively working to include a representative from the CNMI, as the buildup on Tinian is a key component of the Department of Defense's broader strategy to enhance regional defense capabilities. Additionally, efforts are underway to secure a representative from the Port Authority of Guam, which oversees all of Guam's marinas, to ensure comprehensive input on maritime and infrastructure concerns.

A devastating loss:

The Guam community, including local cultural and environmentalists are mourning the loss of Guam's last mature fire tree, locally known as Håyun Lågu tree, which was destroyed by a combination of deforestation and the devastating effects of Typhoon Mawar in 2023.



Håyun Lågu, scientifically known as *Serianthes nelsonii*, is a sacred symbol of resilience and cultural heritage for the CHamoru people. It was endemic to Guam and Rota and stood as a connection between the islands' past and present.

Cultural practitioners, environmental advocates, and community leaders had long raised concerns about the risks posed by military development in areas like the one where the Håyun Lågu tree stood. Activists on Guam warned that the construction of the U.S. Marines' live-fire training range, which required the clearing of parts of the surrounding limestone forest, left the tree vulnerable to environmental threats.

“The loss of this tree is not just the loss of a living organism,” said Maria Hernandez May. “The Håyun Lågu was an elder, a silent witness to our history, and a powerful reminder of our deep connection to the land. Its loss underscores the fragility of our environment and the delicate balance we must maintain to protect it.”

In 2019, Guam's senators passed a resolution calling for a halt to the firing range construction to fully assess its environmental impact. However, federal agencies rejected the request, proceeding with the project despite local concerns.

Despite attempts to mitigate the damage, the Håyun Lågu suffered irreparable harm when Typhoon Mawar struck in May 2023. Without the protection of the forest canopy, which had been cleared for the range, the tree could not withstand the storm's brutal winds.

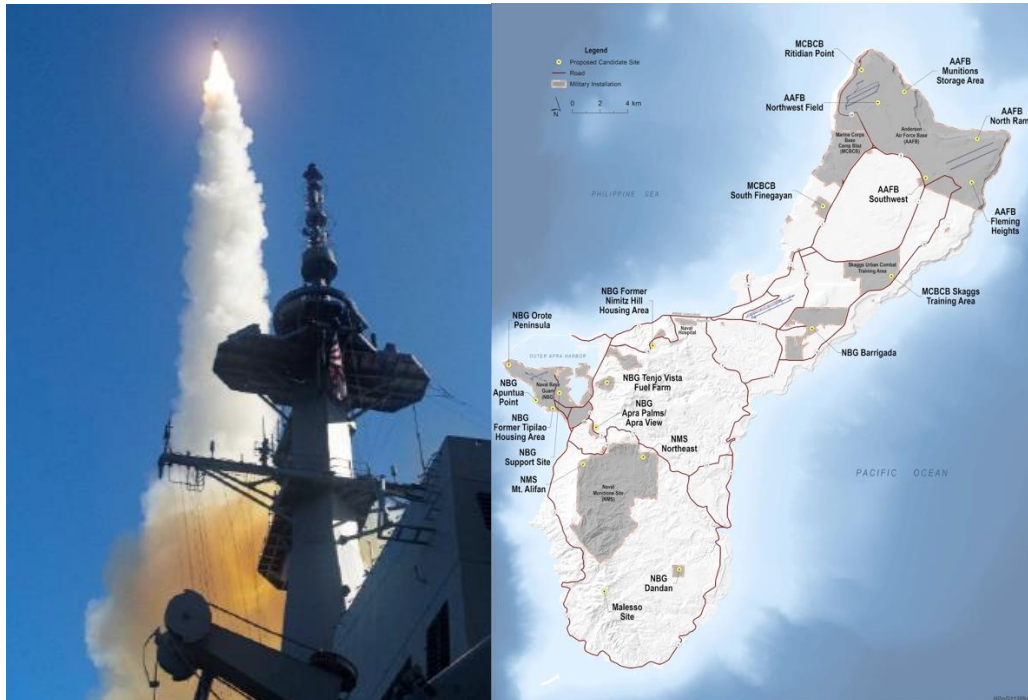
Prutehi Litekyan board member Joni Kerr condemned the ongoing destruction, saying, “The military's actions have not only decimated one of the last pristine limestone forests but have also undermined cultural knowledge and Indigenous healing practices. The Håyun Lågu was more than just a tree—it was a symbol of our identity, our resilience, and our connection to the land.” In response, the military has begun efforts to grow seedlings of *Serianthes nelsonii*, the species to which the Håyun Lågu belonged, but environmentalists remain cautious, questioning whether the species can truly thrive given the ongoing loss of its habitat.

The loss of the Håyun Lågu has sparked a renewed call for stronger environmental protections, with local and international advocates pushing for greater safeguards to prevent further destruction of critical ecosystems.

## Guam Council Member Frank Perez

*Hafa Adai!*

### Missile Testing



Missile Testing

Missile Defense Sites

The Missile Defense Agency (MDA) will be conducting a missile intercept exercise this month, December, as part of a series of biannual tests scheduled over a ten-year period. These exercises will take place on existing military property but will impact areas below the cliff line at Ritidian and Tarague beaches.

Flight test debris would include the interceptor's second-stage booster, all target booster stages, the extraction pallet and parachutes used to air-launch the target, which are projected to fall "beyond the EEZ of Guam in international waters."

"The likelihood of any fish, sea turtle, marine mammal, or seabird being in the exact location of debris suspended in the water and ingesting it is extremely low," and the probability of marine biological resources being in the impacted



area and at the ocean surface is low; “therefore, the risk of potential impacts from noise is low.”

A draft environmental impact statement on what’s commonly referred to as a 360-degree missile defense system for Guam was released on October 25, 2024. The plan was scaled back from the initial 20 sites around Guam to 14 for launchers, radar, and interceptor systems.

The 360-degree defense system is intended to supplement existing systems and better protect Guam from different types of missiles, especially with threats from China and North Korea.

### Guam Fishermen’s Coop

Meanwhile, the Guam Fishermen’s Coop, which was severely damaged by Typhoon Mawar in May 2023, remains closed due to the destruction caused by the storm and the ongoing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Full reopening is not anticipated until late 2025 or early 2026. In the interim, local fishers are adapting by finding alternative ways to sell their catch, including vending roadside, supplying restaurants, and selling to local stores and fish markets. Some are also fulfilling specific orders directly.

### Derby

Ambros, Inc., the Budweiser distributor in Guam and American Samoa, recently celebrated its 75th anniversary by hosting a special one-time, one-day fishing derby on October 5. A total of 97 boats participated in the event, which featured categories based on the heaviest catch. The heaviest blue marlin weighed in at 175.3 lbs., the heaviest yellowfin tuna at 45.7 lbs., the heaviest wahoo at 26.9 lbs., the heaviest mahi-mahi at 31.7 lbs., and the heaviest bonita at 16.3 lbs.

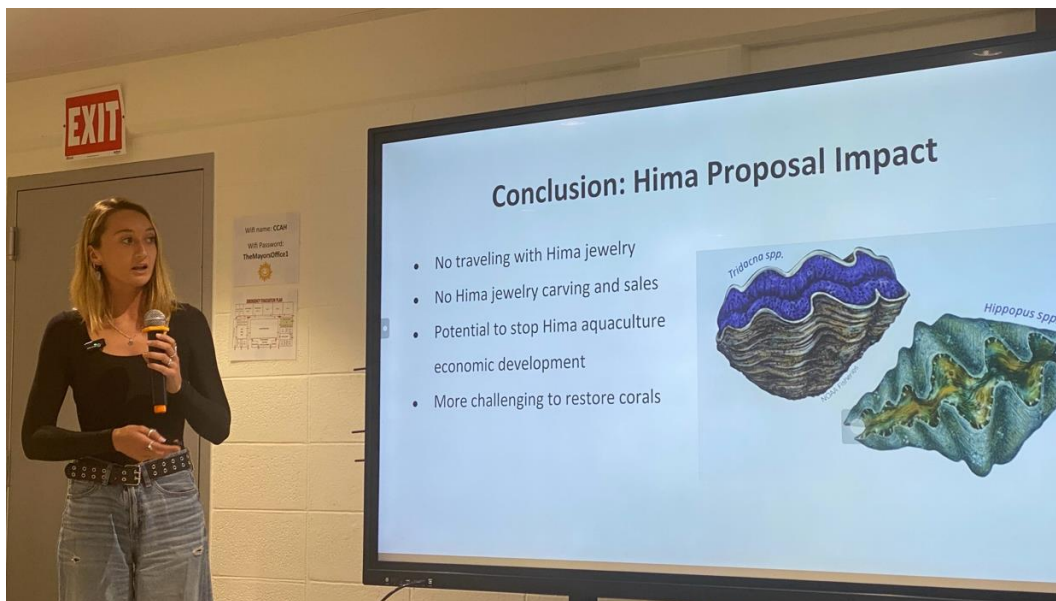


Winning Pacific Blue Marlin. 175.3 lbs.

## Guam Council Member Chelsa Muña

### Giant Clams

The Department of Agriculture and Wildlife Resources (DAWR) held two public forums in October to discuss the proposed listing of giant clams. One forum took place in the village of Sinajaña, while the other was held in the village of Inalahan. The goal was to bring the discussion directly to the community, making it more accessible for residents, rather than requiring them to attend the public hearings organized by NOAA held at a local hotel. Both events were well attended, with strong community participation and valuable feedback gathered from attendees.



Sinajaña Village



Inalahan Village



## Coral Reef Taskforce



Members of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) convened in Saipan from November 18 to 22 for their 49th meeting, where they shared updates, research findings, and innovative strategies aimed at coral reef conservation and management. During the USCRTF Business Meeting on November 14, attended by Guam Governor Lou Leon Guerrero, Governor Arnold Palacios made a historic move by signing an executive order that formally recognizes coral reefs as critical natural infrastructure. This landmark action paves the way for incorporating coral reefs into the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' (CNMI) disaster preparedness, recovery, and mitigation plans.



Governor Leon Guerrero expressed her enthusiasm about the development, stating, "This is a major step forward in the protection and restoration of our coral reefs. I am thrilled that Governor Palacios signed an executive order designating coral reefs as critical infrastructure—essential to our livelihoods, our economy, and so much more. This is a significant leap in bringing the attention and focus they deserve."

The USCRTF meets biannually to continue advancing efforts in coral reef conservation and management across the U.S. jurisdictions.

### Climate Change and Weather

CNN recently reported that, for the first time in recorded history, four named storms have been active simultaneously in the western Pacific during the month of November, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency. Experts predict that such occurrences may become more common in the future, driven by rising oceanographic and atmospheric temperatures. It has been a particularly active typhoon season for Guam and the Mariana Islands, with multiple storms impacting the region in recent months.



Signs of global warming - storms

Un Dangkulu na Si Yu'us Ma'ase