



COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
Office of the Governor
Public Information and Protocol Office

Caller Box 10007 • Saipan, MP 96950 • Tel: (670) 237-2232 • Fax: (670) 664-2211

PRESS RELEASE

Agreement Reached to Transfer Northern Islands Submerged Lands to the CNMI

Saipan, MP (September 22, 2016) – Today, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the US Department of Commerce, and the US Department of the Interior have formally reached an agreement that is one of the final steps necessary in the process of transferring the submerged lands around the islands of Farallon de Pajaros (Uracas), Maug, and Asuncion and associated mineral rights to the CNMI.

The memorandum of agreement (MOA) establishes the terms and conditions for the coordination of management of the Northern Islands Submerged Lands. The MOA also lays out roles and responsibilities of the CNMI Government, NOAA Fisheries, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service for the preservation and protection of the natural resources of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument.

With the signing of the MOA, the process now moves to the execution of a patent, which would ultimately transfer the submerged lands to the CNMI after a 60-day congressional review.

“This MOA is the result of a great working relationship between the CNMI, NOAA, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service,” Governor Ralph DLG. Torres said. “We are now on the final stretch of regaining a significant part of our cultural heritage and reinforcing our commitment to preserving and protecting our natural resources in the Northern Islands, and I want to thank everyone who played a part in getting to this point.”

“NOAA Fisheries is pleased to partner in the announcement of another milestone in the transfer of submerged lands to the local government,” said Eileen Sobeck, assistant NOAA administrator for fisheries. “This is an accomplishment borne of close collaboration and we look forward to continuing strong relationships as we work together to keep these incredible underwater natural resources sustainable and resilient.”

“This agreement represents the collaboration and hard work of many individuals within our two federal agencies and the Commonwealth,” said Michael Bean, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks for the Department of the Interior. “I look forward to continuing our efforts to keep these incredible underwater resources sustainable and resilient for the future.”

The Northern Islands Submerged Lands are among some of the most biologically diverse in the Western Pacific Ocean, with relatively pristine coral reef ecosystems that have been proclaimed objects of scientific interest and reserved for their protection as part of the Monument's Islands Unit, by Presidential Proclamation 8335. The Monument was established for the purpose of protecting the submerged volcanic areas of the Mariana Ridge; the marine environment around the islands of Farallon de Pajaros (Uracas), Maug, and Asuncion in the CNMI; and the Mariana Trench.

#####