UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE
Office of Response and Restoration
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Memorandum For: Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), Division of Coastal Resources Management, Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality (BECQ)

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From: Tom Barry, NOAA Marine Debris Program (MDP)

Date: 24 July 2023

Re: Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) Compliance for the NOAA-funded Pacific Coastal Research & Planning – Abandoned and Derelict Vessel (ADV) and Large Marine Debris Removal Partnership between the U.S. Territories and Freely Associated States (FAS) of Micronesia

NOAA's Marine Debris Program (MDP) is funding the removal of ADVs and derelict fishing gear (DFG) from the nearshore waters of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), a U.S. Territory, and in the Republic of Palau, a FAS. The project will also develop marine debris removal partnerships to inform future removals. Projects are summarized below and identify marine debris target types, locations, and removal methods, where these have been determined.

Removal of ADVs from Shallow Waters of Rota (CNMI)

This project is for removal of four ADVs from coastal waters of Rota, the southernmost island in the CNMI, annual ADV surveys to be completed by the Coral Reef Research Foundation (CRRF) throughout the southwest outer islands, and a partnership through the Department of Defense's (DoD) Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) program to inform additional future ADV removals in the CNMI. The four ADVs were identified by NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration (NOAA 2003) and their removal is considered a high priority by the CNMI Coral Reef Task Force (NOAA 2008). The ADVs are in Sasanlagu Harbor on the southwest coast of Rota. Benthic habitat data (NOAA 2017) indicate the ADV locations are in areas uncolonized by corals and previous reports describe the ADV locations as coral rubble (NOAA 2005). ADVs targeted for removal are the Rota Queen (65.5' X 11 ft' steel tugboat), grounded in the 1970s, and three U.S. Military M-boats (all 106'X29' steel) that were grounded in the 1960s. The ADVs are within a half mile of each other in 1-4' of water and exposed, creating entrapment hazards. Material and hazardous fluids have been removed, leaving only steel debris. Preliminary surveys indicate the vessels will need to be cut and lifted to a staging area for further dismantling. Rota has no permitted landfill but has a disposal facility to accept the debris. Steel parts can be shipped to Taiwan for processing. The project is expected to occur over two years.

BMPs will be implemented to avoid and minimize impacts to sensitive habitats and protected resources during ADV removals.

We are currently completing an environmental review for the grants for these projects and wanted to confirm there were no Coastal Zone Management (CZM) compliance issues related to our actions. Given the nature of the work and the anticipated impacts and positive benefits from such activities, the NOAA MDP finds that the activities to be carried out under the grant awards are consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the CNMI Coastal Zone Management Program. Please confirm your concurrence with our assessment.

We appreciate your input and look forward to your response.

Thank you very much,

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*Please confirm receipt of this email with Pam Latham (pam.latham@noaa.gov) and copy her on any correspondence. Feel free to give her a call 813-786-7910 if you have any questions. We look forward to your reply.