

TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH
LEGISLATURE
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SESSION, 2025

H. Res. 24-11

A HOUSE RESOLUTION

To respectfully urge the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to ensure meaningful and equitable involvement of Northern Marianas Descent (NMD) persons, and recognition of the Northern Mariana Islands' traditional knowledge, stewardship, and proprietary rights in all current and future activities related to ocean exploration, marine research, data ownership, and commercialization of marine resources in the Mariana Trench and surrounding waters.

1 **WHEREAS**, the Urááli Refaluwasch Association (URA), a registered
2 nonprofit organization (CNMI Business License No. 27006), has submitted a
3 position paper to NOAA articulating critical concerns regarding ocean exploration
4 within the Mariana Trench and adjacent marine environments; and

5 **WHEREAS**, the people of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana
6 Islands (CNMI), particularly those of Northern Marianas Descent (NMD), possess
7 a deep cultural, historical, and spiritual connection to the surrounding ocean, which
8 forms an integral part of their identity and way of life; and

9 **WHEREAS**, the CNMI, as a U.S. territory with a unique political status
10 under Public Law 94-241, maintains a right to exercise self-government and to

1 protect its natural and cultural resources from exploitation or exclusion from
2 national scientific and economic benefits; and

3 **WHEREAS**, the URA’s position paper emphasizes the need for NOAA and
4 related federal agencies to integrate Indigenous knowledge systems, promote local
5 leadership and capacity building, and ensure equitable benefit-sharing of data and
6 any commercial applications that emerge from exploration activities; and

7 **WHEREAS**, the CNMI has a growing body of local experts, researchers,
8 and traditional practitioners whose contributions can enrich and guide NOAA’s
9 efforts in the region; and

10 **WHEREAS**, failure to involve NMD communities in the research, data
11 access, and decision-making processes constitutes not only a scientific oversight,
12 but also a violation of ethical standards for community engagement and self-
13 determination; and

14 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the House of
15 Representatives of the Twenty-Fourth Northern Marianas Commonwealth
16 Legislature, that it hereby expresses its strong support for the recommendations
17 made by the Urááli Refaluwasch Association to the National Oceanic and
18 Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and urges NOAA to adopt and implement
19 those recommendations in full, including:

20 (a) formal recognition of Northern Marianas Descent (NMD) proprietary
21 rights in marine data collected within CNMI waters;

1 (b) co-management of Mariana Trench exploration efforts with the CNMI
2 Government and Indigenous organizations; and

3 (c) Indigenous knowledge integration in all stages of marine research,
4 planning, and resource utilization; and

5 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the House of Representatives
6 specifically calls upon NOAA to enter into a formal memorandum of understanding
7 (MOU) with the CNMI Government and recognized Indigenous organizations,
8 including the Urááli Refaluwasch Association, for the purpose of:

9 (a) jointly developing all future ocean exploration and marine research
10 protocols to be conducted in CNMI waters;

11 (b) mandating the inclusion of qualified NMD subject-matter experts in all
12 NOAA-supported field activities and scientific teams; and

13 (c) establishing a binding framework for data-sharing, intellectual property
14 protection, and equitable benefit-sharing for any commercial or scientific outcomes
15 resulting from activities in CNMI waters; and

16 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the House of Representatives
17 requests NOAA to issue a formal public commitment to:

18 (a) recognize and incorporate traditional Chamorro and Carolinian
19 stewardship practices in its operational planning and research efforts;

20 (b) prioritize the hiring and training of CNMI residents for all NOAA-
21 affiliated initiatives conducted in the region; and


1 (c) guarantee that all marine data collected from CNMI waters is locally
2 archived, fully accessible to the CNMI Government, and not transferred or shared
3 with third parties without prior consultation and consent from the CNMI
4 Government and affected Indigenous stakeholders; and

5 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Speaker of the House of
6 Representatives shall certify, and the House Clerk shall attest to the adoption of this
7 resolution and thereafter the House Clerk shall transmit a certified copy to the
8 Honorable Arnold I. Palacios, Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern
9 Mariana Islands; the Honorable Kimberlyn King-Hinds, Delegate to the United
10 States House of Representatives; the Honorable J. D. Vance, Vice President of the
11 United States and President of the U.S. Senate; the Honorable Mike Johnson,
12 Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives; the Honorable Dr. Richard W.
13 Spinrad, Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration;
14 the CNMI Indigenous Affairs Office; the Carolinian Affairs Office; and Carmelita
15 “Millie” Rabauliman-Faisao, President of the Urááli Refaluwasch Association.


Prefiled: 07.10.2025

Date: _____

Introduced by: _____


Rep. Denita Kaipat Yangetmai

Reviewed for legal sufficiency by:


House Legal Counsel

Date: 7-10-25