

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

SESSION, 2025

H. Res.

24-19

A HOUSE RESOLUTION

To Express the Sense of the House of Representatives of the Twenty-Fourth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature Regarding the United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's Request for Information and Interest on Commercial Leasing for Outer Continental Shelf Minerals Offshore the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Published in the Federal Register on November 12, 2025 (FR Doc. No. 2025-19852), and to Urge Respect for CNMI Self-Government, Indigenous Rights, Environmental Protection, Equitable Benefit-Sharing, and the Lessons of Global and Pacific History.

1 **WHEREAS**, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)
2 is a self-governing political entity in political union with the United States pursuant
3 to the Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in
4 Political Union with the United States of America; and

5 **WHEREAS**, the people of the CNMI, including Chamorro and Carolinian
6 (Refaluwasch) Indigenous peoples, have relied for generations on the surrounding
7 ocean for food security, cultural practice, navigation, traditional knowledge, and
8 spiritual beliefs; and

9 **WHEREAS**, the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA), 43
10 U.S.C. §§ 1331–1356c, as amended, authorizes the U.S. Department of the Interior

1 to lease minerals on the outer continental shelf, including “any mineral other than
2 oil, gas, and sulfur” under section 8(k), 43 U.S.C. § 1337(k), for cash bonus bids,
3 rentals, and royalties as the Secretary may prescribe; and

4 **WHEREAS**, the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 extended the definition
5 of the Outer Continental Shelf to include certain submerged lands adjacent to U.S.
6 territories, thereby clarifying federal authority to regulate mineral resources in the
7 U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) adjacent to the CNMI; and

8 **WHEREAS**, on November 12, 2025, the Bureau of Ocean Energy
9 Management (BOEM) published in the Federal Register a Request for Information
10 and Interest (RFI) titled “Commercial Leasing for Outer Continental Shelf Minerals
11 Offshore the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands,” seeking indications
12 of industry interest and public comment regarding potential leasing for non-oil-and-
13 gas minerals in an offshore area of approximately 35.48 million acres; and

14 **WHEREAS**, the RFI area consists of deep ocean waters and seabed
15 features, including abyssal plains, seamounts, and guyots, within the U.S. EEZ
16 adjacent to the CNMI and has been identified as potentially prospective for
17 ferromanganese crusts, polymetallic nodules, and other mineral deposits that may
18 contain critical minerals; and

19 **WHEREAS**, the RFI contemplates a series of steps that could lead to
20 competitive leasing and eventual commercial deep-sea mining operations,

1 including mining area identification, proposed leasing notices, final leasing notices,
2 and subsequent approval of exploration and mining plans; and

3 **WHEREAS**, any future commercial extraction of seabed minerals offshore
4 the CNMI could have significant environmental, cultural, social, and economic
5 consequences for the CNMI, including risks to deep-sea ecosystems, fisheries, food
6 security, tourism values, and Indigenous cultural and spiritual connections to the
7 ocean; and

8 **WHEREAS**, under existing federal law and regulation, there is currently
9 no explicit, statutory revenue-sharing formula guaranteeing that any portion of
10 bonus bids, rentals, or royalties from seabed mineral leasing offshore the CNMI
11 will be shared with the CNMI government or dedicated to CNMI communities, and
12 no explicit requirement that the Commonwealth's consent be obtained before
13 leasing proceeds; and

14 **WHEREAS**, the House of Representatives recognizes that resource
15 projects can generate some short-term local benefits, such as jobs or infrastructure,
16 but also recognizes that global and regional experience shows that the long-term
17 balance of costs and benefits for Indigenous communities has often been
18 overwhelmingly negative; and

19 **WHEREAS**, historical experience with extractive and strategic projects—
20 such as phosphate mining on Banaba (Ocean Island) and Nauru, the Panguna and
21 Ok Tedi mines in Papua New Guinea, oil production in Nigeria's Niger Delta,

1 uranium mining on Navajo lands in the United States, and nuclear weapons testing
2 in the Marshall Islands and French Polynesia—demonstrates a recurring pattern in
3 which distant governments and corporations pursue “national interest” or
4 “strategic” objectives by exploiting the lands and waters of Indigenous peoples,
5 capture most of the economic and political benefits, and leave local communities
6 with long-term environmental damage, health crises, social disruption, and
7 unresolved cleanup and compensation; and

8 **WHEREAS**, in the Pacific specifically, the history of nuclear testing in the
9 Marshall Islands and French Polynesia shows how small island territories were
10 used as sacrifice zones for nuclear weapons development and deterrence, resulting
11 in displacement, radiation exposure, contaminated land and water, and
12 intergenerational health impacts, while the strategic benefits flowed to Washington
13 and Paris; and

14 **WHEREAS**, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous
15 Peoples, endorsed by the United States in 2010, affirms that Indigenous peoples
16 have the right to the lands, territories, and resources which they have traditionally
17 owned, occupied, or otherwise used or acquired, and that states shall consult and
18 cooperate in good faith with Indigenous peoples to obtain their free, prior, and
19 informed consent before approving any project affecting their lands or territories
20 and other resources; and

1 **WHEREAS**, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
2 and a growing number of states, scientists, financial institutions, and civil society
3 organizations have called for a moratorium or precautionary pause on deep-sea
4 mining, citing the lack of scientific understanding of deep-sea ecosystems and the
5 potential for irreversible harm; and

6 **WHEREAS**, recent U.S. jurisprudence has criticized the legacy of colonial-
7 era doctrines, such as the Insular Cases, that treated U.S. territories as separate and
8 unequal, and the CNMI has a legitimate interest in ensuring that its offshore areas
9 are not managed under a double standard that sacrifices territorial communities for
10 national strategic objectives; and

11 **WHEREAS**, the House of Representatives recognizes that, if any seabed
12 mineral activities are ever to proceed offshore the CNMI, they must only do so
13 under a precautionary, science-based framework that fully respects Indigenous
14 rights, intergenerational equity, environmental stewardship, and the CNMI's
15 legitimate expectation of equitable economic participation and benefit-sharing; and

16 **WHEREAS**, the House of Representatives expresses its strong concern
17 that, under current federal law and policy, the primary benefits of any seabed
18 mineral leasing offshore the CNMI would accrue to the United States federal
19 government and private industry, while the environmental, cultural, and
20 socioeconomic risks would fall disproportionately on the people and environment
21 of the CNMI; and

1 **WHEREAS**, the House of Representatives calls upon the United States
2 Congress to enact legislation establishing, at a minimum, (1) a clear territorial
3 consent requirement for any commercial mineral leasing under OCSLA adjacent to
4 the CNMI and other U.S. territories, consistent with the principle of free, prior, and
5 informed consent, and (2) a statutory revenue-sharing formula for OCS critical-
6 mineral leasing that provides the CNMI with a fair and equitable share of all bonus
7 bids, rentals, and royalties, not less favorable than revenue-sharing arrangements
8 applicable to coastal states for other offshore resources; and

9 **WHEREAS**, the House of Representatives urges BOEM and the U.S.
10 Department of the Interior, in the interim and within the scope of current authority,
11 to; and

12 **WHEREAS**, refrain from advancing from the RFI stage to any proposed
13 leasing notice for the CNMI offshore area unless and until there has been robust,
14 transparent, and inclusive consultation with the CNMI government, Indigenous
15 leaders, municipal governments, fishers, and affected communities; and

16 **WHEREAS**, recognize in policy and practice that no commercial seabed
17 mining activity should proceed in the CNMI offshore area in the absence of clear,
18 informed, and freely given support from the elected leadership and Indigenous
19 communities of the CNMI; and

1 **WHEREAS**, identify, in collaboration with the CNMI government and
2 Indigenous knowledge holders, culturally and ecologically sensitive areas that must
3 be excluded from any consideration for leasing; and

4 **WHEREAS**, commit to full, timely sharing with the CNMI of all
5 environmental, geological, oceanographic, and socioeconomic data collected in
6 connection with the CNMI offshore area, and to support the development of CNMI-
7 based capacity to interpret and use such data for marine planning, conservation, and
8 disaster resilience; and


9 **WHEREAS**, design any future lease terms, if leasing is ever pursued, to
10 incorporate strong and enforceable requirements for local employment, training,
11 and business opportunities; use of CNMI ports where feasible; independent
12 environmental monitoring funded by lessees but overseen by CNMI institutions;
13 and the establishment of long-term mitigation and community benefit funds for the
14 CNMI; and

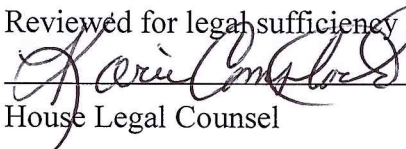
15 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the House of
16 Representatives of the Twenty-Fourth Northern Marianas Commonwealth
17 Legislature, that the House supports the submission of formal comments to
18 BOEM's RFI consistent with the concerns, historical lessons, and principles
19 expressed in this Resolution, and encourages the Governor and all relevant CNMI
20 agencies to adopt and reinforce these positions in their own submissions and
21 advocacy; and

1 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Speaker of the House of
2 Representatives shall certify, and the House Clerk shall attest to the adoption of this
3 resolution, and thereafter the House Clerk shall transmit a certified copy to the
4 Honorable Donald J. Trump, President, United States of America; the Honorable
5 JD Vance, Vice President, United States of America; Representatives and Senators
6 of the 119th United States Congress; the Honorable Doug Burgum, Secretary,
7 United States Department of Interior; Elizabeth Klein, Director, Bureau of Ocean
8 Energy Management; Carmen G. Cantor, Assistant Secretary for Insular and
9 International Affairs, United States Department of Interior; the Honorable David
10 M. Apatang, Governor, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands; the
11 Honorable Kimberlyn K. King-Hinds, CNMI Delegate to the U.S. House of
12 Representatives, 119th United States Congress; and the Honorable Karl R. King-
13 Nabors, Senate President, 24th Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature.

Prefiled: 12/2/2025

Date: _____

Introduced by: 
Rep. Vincent S. Aldan

Reviewed for legal sufficiency by:

House Legal Counsel

Date: 12-2-25

