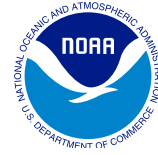
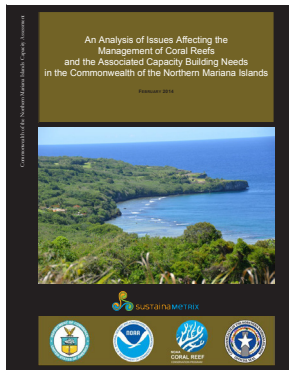


# Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands



NOAA CORAL REEF CONSERVATION PROGRAM

## Coral Reef Management Capacity Challenges and Recommendations



The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) is a chain of 14 islands divided into two sections, with large variations in the coral reef resources between the south and the north. The southern islands are protected by barrier reefs and well-developed fringing reefs on the western coasts while the largely uninhabited northern islands have much less potential coral reef area.

Coral reef ecosystems in the commonwealth are, on the whole, reasonably healthy. However, environmental stressors acting synergistically with anthropogenic stressors, such as nonpoint source pollution and fishing pressure, have clearly affected areas in proximity to the populated southern islands. Traditional cultural connections to the natural environment and subsistence fishing practices are still present, and residents use the coral reef and marine resources for recreation and fishing.

The commonwealth's Office of the Governor created the CNMI Coral Reef Initiative in 2003. The initiative mandated a joint effort for coral reef conservation among three managing agencies: the Division of Environmental Quality, Division of Fish and Wildlife, and Division of Coastal Resources Management.

Recently, a team of experts supported by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coral Reef Conservation Program conducted an assessment of the programs working to manage and conserve coral reefs in the commonwealth. The resulting report, *An Analysis of Issues Affecting the Management of Coral Reefs and the Associated Capacity Building Needs in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands*, is available on the program website at [www.coralreef.noaa.gov](http://www.coralreef.noaa.gov). Some of the findings are summarized below.

### NATIONAL SUMMARY

As part of a capacity-assessment process, a team of specialists identified challenges common to all seven U.S. coral reef jurisdictions and provided recommendations to overcome them. These findings are summarized below.

#### CHALLENGES

- A lack of political will and formal commitment for increased coral reef management
- A lack of long-term and sustainable financing
- A lack of supportive and informed constituencies
- A need to move from planning to implementation
- A need for improved enforcement and compliance
- A need for increased support for the effective function and structure of management agencies

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support for a collaborative approach for the reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000
- The expansion and institutionalization of staff capacity-building programs in the jurisdictions
- Establishment of a working group of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force focused on improving the enforcement of laws that safeguard coral reefs
- Strategic engagement of governors to champion coral reef conservation and management
- Facilitation of peer-to-peer learning exchanges among the jurisdictions

Read the full report, *A Synthesis of Issues Affecting the Management of Coral Reefs and Recommendations for Long-term Capacity Building in U.S. Jurisdictions*, at [www.coralreef.noaa.gov](http://www.coralreef.noaa.gov).

# Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

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## CHALLENGES

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**Broad-level support:** For coral reef conservation to succeed, decision makers and the general public must understand the high economic and cultural value of the state's reefs in terms of tourism, fisheries, recreation, and coastal protection.

**Enforcement of natural resource regulations:** Compliance requires a broad understanding and acceptance of the rationale for regulations, as well as effective and fair enforcement to maintain support for regulations that restrict certain activities. Increased political and financial support are needed to effectively enforce the rules and policies adopted by the coastal and fisheries management programs.

**Common framework:** Natural resource managers across the commonwealth have increasing responsibilities to meet with fewer resources and often face high staff member turnover. There is no common framework for managers in the various organizations to plan for and implement coherent, ecosystem-based management strategies that make the most of limited staff members and resources.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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There are several recommended actions that, if implemented, will significantly improve marine conservation and management:

- Generate high-level institutional and political support for coral reef conservation and management
- Use a collaborative and coordinated approach to pursue ecosystem-based management at priority sites
- Focus programs and training to build on a range of technical, financial, social, institutional, and political capacities

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## MORE INFORMATION



NOAA  
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CONSERVATION PROGRAM

This capacity assessment was conducted by Sustainamatrix under contract to the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program. We would like to thank the many partners who participated in this process. The assessments are available online at [www.coralreef.noaa.gov/aboutcrctp/strategy/reprioritization/capacityassessments](http://www.coralreef.noaa.gov/aboutcrctp/strategy/reprioritization/capacityassessments).

Dana Okano | Coral Reef Management Liaison  
[Dana.Okano@noaa.gov](mailto:Dana.Okano@noaa.gov)

Steve McKagan | Fisheries Liaison  
[Steve.McKagan@noaa.gov](mailto:Steve.McKagan@noaa.gov)