



Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality

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2022 CNMI WATER QUALITY ASSESSMENT INTEGRATED REPORT - FACT SHEET

The Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality (BECQ) is seeking written comments on the proposed 2020 CNMI Water Quality Assessment Integrated Report. **The deadline for submission of comments is October 19, 2022 by 4:30 PM.**

What is this report? Every two years BECQ is required to report on the condition of CNMI waters in accordance with the federal Clean Water Act. BECQ determines if our waters meet their **designated uses**, which make them “fishable and swimmable”. The Section 305(b) describes BECQ’s findings, and Section 303(d) lists CNMI’s impaired waterbodies. This report helps to prioritize waters for further data gathering, protection, or restoration.

**Submit written comments to
Eli Cabrera, Administrator of BECQ at
the mail address listed, or**

**Drop off at BECQ office on Middle Rd,
Gualo Rai or**

email: cnmi.waterquality@gmail.com

Phone: (670) 664-8500

No later than 4:30 pm, 10/19/22

Designated Uses include

- Propagation of Aquatic Life - The waterbody supports the propagation of aquatic life;
- Fish Consumption - Fish and shellfish may be safely harvested from these waters for consumption;
- Recreation - It is safe for people to recreate in or on the water (skin contact) without causing illness;
- Aesthetic Enjoyment - The water provides aesthetic enjoyment; and
- Potable Water Supply - In the case of fresh surface waters, they can be used as a potable water supply

How does BECQ determine if a waterbody's Designated Uses are being met?

Designated Use	Criteria to Assess Support of the Designated Uses
Propagation of Aquatic life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat suitability: Stream visual assessment score of “fair” or “good” for all sites within segment and other study results • DO%: No more than 10% of samples exceeding WQS for all sites within segment • General provisions met: no floating/settleable solids, no more than 10% of pH samples exceed WQS for all sites within the segment, no radioactive substances
Fish consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish tissue/biota collected within the segment are to be free of contaminant concentrations exceeding USEPA standards; or very low likelihood of tissue contamination due to current or historic land use patterns in adjacent watersheds; or lack of edible fish species present in water.
Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>E. coli</i> or Enterococci bacteria: No more than 10% of samples result in exceedance of WQS • General provisions met: no floating/settleable solids, no more than 10% of pH samples exceed WQS for all sites within segment, no radioactive substances
Potable Water Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>E. coli</i> bacteria: No more than 10% of samples result in exceedance of WQS • General provisions met: no floating/settleable solids, no more than 10% of pH samples exceed WQS for all sites within segment, no radioactive substances
Aesthetic Enjoyment & Other Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No floating/settleable solids • Empirical evidence, Research papers, documents, tourist surveys, studies, etc.

What information is contained in the CWA 303(d) list of Impaired waters? Impaired waterbodies are added to the 303(d) list, which specifies the cause of impairment, or pollutant, e.g., Fecal indicator bacteria, pH, phosphate, etc., and the potential sources of pollution, e.g., Wet weather discharge of non-point sources of pollution, on-site treatment system failures, animal waste, etc. A Total Maximum Daily Load limit is required for each impaired waterbody. The load limits the amount of contamination that can be present in the waterbody for it to still meet Water Quality Standards.

How does BECQ assess attainment of designated uses, or if they are threatened, or impaired by a pollutant? The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends using their Consolidated Assessment and Listing Methodology (CALM) Categories to rank a waterbody’s attainment or its “health”.

EPA CALM CATEGORY:	DESCRIPTION
1	All designated uses are supported, no use is threatened
2	Attains some designated uses, no use is threatened, and there is insufficient information to determine if the other uses are attained/or impaired
3	There is insufficient available data and/or information to determine if designated uses are supported or impaired. Potential presence of stressors that may cause impairment
4a	A Total Maximum Daily Load limit has been established to reduce the amount of a pollutant from exceeding water quality standards, and it has been approved by EPA
4b	A designated use is impaired by a pollutant, but it is being addressed by the state through other pollution control, other than a Total Maximum Daily Load limit
4c ¹	A designated use impaired, but the impairment is not caused by a pollutant ¹
5	Available information indicates that at least one designated use is threatened, or not attained. The waterbody is added to the 303(d) list as impaired and a Total Maximum Daily Load limit is required to reduce the pollutant.
5-alt	An alternative restoration approach is being pursued to meet water quality standards, in the interim while a Total Maximum Daily Load limit is being developed.

¹ The Clean Water Act defines “pollution not caused by a pollutant” as “the man-made or man-induced alteration of the chemical, physical, biological, or radiological integrity of water” (CWA Section 502(19))

What has changed since the last Integrated Report in 2020? Most of Saipan, Tinian, and Rota’s coastal waters still were assessed as CALM Category (Impaired) 5 due to one or more pollutants exceeding CNMI Water Quality Standards. However, there were some improvements:

ROTA - Chaliat/Talo watershed’s coastal waters meet water quality standards for enterococcus. 2.6 coastal miles were removed from the 303(d) impaired waters list for bacteria.

SAIPAN – Several miles of Saipan’s coast line had a decrease in the percent of Red Flags (exceedances of the water quality standards for fecal indicator bacteria). This included the South Susupe, North Achugao, and As Matuis watersheds. These improvements are associated with: upgrades to Saipan’s sewer system; construction and proper maintenance of roadway stormwater catchment systems.

TINIAN – All of Tinian’s coastal sites showed an increase in the percent of Red Flags. However, nutrient levels were markedly improved.

NORTHERN ISLANDS – This was the first reporting cycle that BECQ staff were able to visit Pagan and collect water samples for analysis. All samples easily met water quality standards.

What is the status of CNMI Coastal Waters? Most of the Northern Islands, except Farallon de Medinilla are considered to be fully supporting all designated use, and most of Saipan’s coastal waters have already had a Total Maximum Daily Load limit established for reducing bacteria loading, and are assessed as CALM category 4a, taking them of the 303(d) Impaired Waters list.

Designated Use	Not Supporting (miles)	Threatened (miles)	Insufficient Data (miles)	Fully Supporting (miles)	Not Assessed (miles)	Total Assessed (miles)
ALL CNMI COASTAL WATERS (Class AA and A)						
Propagation of shellfish and other aquatic life	102.0	0	0.0	138.5	0	240.5
Fish/shellfish consumption	9.5	0	138.4	92.6	0	240.5
Recreation with risk of waterborne illness	85.2	0	6.7	148.6	0	240.5
Aesthetic enjoyment /other uses	4.2	0	0	236.3	0	240.5
TOTAL CNMI COASTAL MILES						240.5

What is the status of CNMI Streams? Of the 100.5 miles of streams, only a few sites have been tested for water quality due to the infrequency with which they flow. The most common cause for impairment was fecal indicator bacteria, phosphate, nitrate, and dissolved oxygen. To augment limited data BECQ now uses the CNMI Stream Visual Field Assessment Protocol to rate the integrity of stream health.

Designated Use	Not Supporting (miles)	Threatened (miles)	Insufficient Data (miles)	Fully Supporting (miles)	Not Assessed (miles)	Total Assessed (miles)	Total in CNMI (miles)
ALL STREAMS (Class 1)							
Propagation of shellfish and other aquatic life	3.2	0	27.9	69.4	0	100.5	100.5
Fish/shellfish consumption	9.7	0	90.8	0	0	100.5	100.5
Recreation with risk of waterborne illness	50.3	0	50.2	0.0	0	100.5	100.5
Potable Water Supply	0	0	0.0	0	100.5	100.5	100.5
Aesthetic enjoyment /other uses	3.2	0	0.0	97.3	0	100.5	100.5

What is the status of CNMI Wetlands? Most wetland impairments are from hydrological changes due to fill, introduced non-native species, and changes in flow. This reporting cycle was the first time CNMI took part in the US EPA National Wetland Condition Assessment. Staff were also certified by the “Wetland Training Institute” in wetland delineation methods based on the Army Corps of Engineer’s

manual in December 2021. As a result, a regular wetland monitoring program was established for several sites on Saipan.

Designated Use	Not Supporting/pollutant or non-pollutant	Threatened (Acres)	Insufficient Data / Does not exist (Acres)	Fully Supporting (Acres)	Not Assessed (Acres)	Total Assessed (Acres)	*Total in CNMI (Acres)
ALL WETLANDS (Class 1)							
Propagation of shellfish and other aquatic life	568.4	0	89.2	58.6	0	716.2	716.2

What is the status of CNMI Lakes? There are now five (5) lakes in the CNMI Archipelago: Susupe Lake on Saipan; Laguna Sanhiyong, and Sanhalom on Pagan; and Hagoi Haya and Hagoi Lagu which formed on Anatahan after the 2015 eruption. Susupe Lake is considered impaired. There is not enough information to fully assess the four other lakes on Pagan and Anatahan.

Designated Use	Not Supporting /pollutant or non-pollutant (acres)	Threatened (acres)	Insufficient Data (acres)	Fully Supporting (acres)	Not Assessed (acres)	Total Assessed (acres)	*Total in CNMI (acres)
ALL LAKES (Class 1)							
Recreation with risk of waterborne illness	57.4	0	149.0	61.0	0	267.4	267.4
Propagation of shellfish and other aquatic life	57.4	0	149.0	61.0	0	267.4	267.4
Fish/shellfish consumption	0	0	267.4	0	0	267.4	267.4
Aesthetic enjoyment /other uses	0	0	0	267.4	0	267.4	267.4
Potable Water Supply	0	0	149.0	0	118.4	267.4	267.4

* Hagoi Lagu on Anatahan that formed after 2005 eruption has not been delineated or tested.

Pagan was tested for the first time in 2021. It is NOT used for a potable supply due to brackishness

Where can I find more information online on the health of CNMI waters?

- The 2022 and previous years of CNMI 305(b) and 303(d) Water Quality Assessment Integrated Reports can be found on the DEQ website: <https://www.deq.gov.mp/water-quality-surveillance-non-point-source.html>.
- Summary data on CNMI’s waters can be found on EPA’s ATTAINS database at: https://ofmpub.epa.gov/waters10/attains_state.control?p_state=CN