

CNMI INTER-ISLAND SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT TASKFORCE



CNMI OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Responsiveness Summary for the Public Participation Period on the Development of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Comprehensive Integrated Solid Waste Management Plan

June 2025

This responsiveness summary was prepared in accordance with [40 CFR 256.60\(a\)\(3\)](#) and [40 CFR 25.8](#).

Responsiveness Summary for the Public Participation Period on the Development of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Comprehensive Integrated Solid Waste Management Plan

On Tuesday, April 1, 2025, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Office of Planning and Development (OPD), on behalf of the CNMI Inter-Island Solid Waste Management Taskforce (ISWMT), disseminated the latest draft of the CNMI Comprehensive Integrated Solid Waste Management Plan (CISWMP) for public consumption. CNMI OPD conducted public hearings within each senatorial district of the CNMI to garner public input on the development of the CNMI CISWMP. The first of the three public hearings was held in the first senatorial district (Rota), in the Office of the Mayor of Rota Social Hall, on Monday, May 19, 2025, from 5:30 to 7 p.m. The second public hearing was held in the second senatorial district (Tinian and Aguiguan), in the Tinian Public Library, on Wednesday, May 21, 2025, from 6 to 7:30 p.m. The third and final public hearing was held in the third senatorial district (Saipan and the Northern Islands), in the American Memorial Park Museum Theater, on Thursday, May 22, 2025, from 6 to 7:30 p.m. The general public was welcome to provide their views, significant comments, criticisms, and suggestions on the development of the CNMI CISWMP until the public participation period concluded at 12 a.m. on Monday, May 26, 2026.

The public was consulted on the CNMI's priority solid waste management projects and programs, inclusive of projects and programs funded by the Additional Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act (ASADRA) and the Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling (SWIFR) grant funding through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Public hearing attendees were briefed on cost estimates, project timelines, waste characterization data, and the formal process for plan finalization and EPA submission.

In the first senatorial district (Rota), the general public expressed enthusiasm for the development, submission, and approval of the plan so that the municipality could avail of much-needed federal funding for its solid waste management activities. Concerns were raised, primarily the impact that the Tatachok Dump and future Tatachok Small Community Exempt Landfill (SCEL) will have on Rota's groundwater.

In the second senatorial district (Tinian and Aguiguan), the public outlook on the hearing was generally positive, with community members expressing appreciation for the collaborative effort behind the solid waste plan and offering constructive feedback. Key topics of discussion included the continued availability of federal funding, incineration/bioconversion/waste-to-energy, tax incentives for recycling, and enhanced community engagement through community-led instead of ISWMT-led public hearings, implementing school programs, reuse programs/ foundations in the community, and youth engagement.

In the third senatorial district (Saipan and the Northern Islands), the public response to the plan was generally positive. Feedback during the hearing primarily focused on seeking clarification, with questions centered on the plan's current length, available federal funding, and the strategic intent behind proposed investments in solid waste management equipment and staffing.

Below is a detailed compilation of the general public's views, significant comments, criticisms, and suggestions; and the ISWMT's responses in terms of modifications of the proposed action or an explanation for rejection of proposals made by the public. This compilation includes comments received from the CISWMP Info Hub (<https://opd.gov.mp/ciswmp.html>), which currently serves as the official depository for the development of the CISWMP.

- 1. “Has there been a study done to see if the present dumpsite is seeping into our freshwater lens, and if the [Rota SCEL project] goes forth, can the people of Rota be assured that our precious freshwater lens is protected?”**

Yes. To meet federal and local eligibility requirements for the Small Community Exempt Landfill (SCEL), comprehensive groundwater testing is required to confirm the absence of contamination at the proposed site. Initial testing was conducted in late April; however, unforeseen challenges in transporting samples to a U.S. EPA-certified laboratory necessitated a second round of testing in late May. The results confirm site suitability, and the next phase will involve procuring contractors for the SCEL's assessment and design.

Because assessment of the Tatachok Dump is already included in the Plan, this proposal was rejected.

2. **“When rainy season comes, all those toxic materials seep down into the ground and eventually will go out to the ocean and make fish not go near because of the toxic [material]. That’s our concern, it’s not going to happen right now, but maybe [in the long-term]. The impact will depend on how [the ISWMT] will design the landfill.”**

As noted previously, the results of groundwater testing will guide the next steps for the design of Rota’s landfill. Modern landfill designs incorporate protective layers – such as clay and synthetic liners – to prevent leachate from impacting groundwater or nearby marine environments.

Because assessment of the Tatachok Dump is already included in the Plan, this proposal was rejected.

3. **“Thank you to everyone that plays a significant role in the development of the Comprehensive Plan and thank you to those who are here in person and tuning in online. A lot is not told about the work that you guys do. It’s rough, you have to communicate, start dialogues... [the Resident Director of the CNMI Department of Public Works on Rota] and his team have always been supportive of the Solid Waste Plan. On the federal side, I believe there is a term called ‘cradle-to-grave.’”**

The U.S. EPA has developed a comprehensive program to ensure that hazardous waste is managed safely from the moment it is generated to its final disposal (cradle-to-grave).

Because cradle-to-grave is already included in the Plan, this proposal was rejected.

4. **“Proposed Environmental Education Center – It is better to fund programs through the school system as opposed to constructing a new facility.”**

The proposal to construct a standalone Environmental Education and Recycling Center was initiated by the leadership of Rota, intended to serve a broader audience. Funding programs through the school system is a possible pathway. Select solid waste management initiatives

– such as capacity building and public education – are eligible for funding under ASADRA. While a comprehensive outreach strategy is planned for development and implementation over the next five years, public education efforts are already underway, including collaborating with the municipal governments and the CNMI Public School System (PSS) to explore potential solid waste programs.

Because ongoing discussions with the CNMI PSS to explore potential solid waste management programs is not currently mentioned in the Plan, this proposal was accepted. The Plan will be modified to mention ongoing discussions with the CNMI PSS to explore solid waste management programs.

5. **“It would be better to establish an alternative dumpsite located further away from public areas and the main highway, as the current site poses concerns due to the strong odor and other potential exposure to hazardous materials.”**

The municipal government explored and ultimately designated the Tatachok site as Rota’s official waste disposal location, which was permitted at the time. However, the site is now out of compliance with current federal and CNMI environmental regulations and must be brought into compliance. As previously noted, the site has undergone groundwater testing to assess its suitability for a SCEL. The results support eligibility and the municipality plans to move forward with the SCEL.

Community concerns regarding odors and potential exposure to hazardous materials are valid and are being addressed through the CISWMP. The Plan includes short-term measures such as enhanced odor control, improved waste handling practices, and environmental monitoring to reduce health and environmental risks. Long-term site planning and improvements are also under review. Any decisions about future landfill siting will be made with public input and in accordance with 40 CFR 25.8, and consistent with siting guidance in 40 CFR 256.60(a)(1), to ensure minimal impact on public health and the environment.

Because historical background on the consideration of alternative dump sites by the municipal government is not currently mentioned in the Plan, this proposal was accepted. The Plan will be modified to mention historical background on the consideration of alternative dump sites by the municipal government.

6. “Check in with MOR and DPW to change Tatachok dump closure times to avoid illegal dumping in other areas throughout the island.”

Capacity building – such as hiring and training necessary solid waste management personnel – has been identified as a key priority for the municipality. Strengthening local capacity is critical to improving operational efficiency and advancing the CNMI’s broader solid waste management goals, including deterring illegal dumping. Capacity building is eligible for funding under ASADRA. However, most of the ASADRA funds cannot be expended until the CISWMP is formally approved. As such, that is our next step.

Because capacity building is already included in the Plan, this proposal was rejected.

7. “Rota has been waiting forever to upgrade its dump. When is this going to take place? Every year we hear of the same things. Are there really funds for it?”

The assessment, design, permitting, and construction of the landfill is projected to be completed within the next five years. As mentioned in the response to Question 1, the dump has been assessed for SCEL eligibility and found to be eligible.

In terms of funding, the Rota SCEL is eligible for funding through ASADRA. However, these funds cannot be expended until the CNMI CISWMP is formally approved by the U.S. EPA. As such, the finalization of the CNMI CISWMP is critical.

Because project timeline and funding for the Tatachok Dump upgrade is already included in the Plan, this proposal was rejected.

- 8. “Tipping fees must be implemented ASAP so the Rota SWM have funds to cover operations costs, and other improvements.”**

Per Title 1, Division 5, § 5201 of the Commonwealth Code, the Rota mayor if so designated by the department head, shall be the administrative head of its constituency for the delivery of public services provided by the Commonwealth, and shall have the authority necessary to efficiently and effectively carry out the administration and delivery of public services. This may include the implementation of tipping fees within the municipality.

The CNMI Solid Waste Management Revolving Account Act of 2002 requires that any tipping fees collected from any Commonwealth solid waste management facility be deposited into the Solid Waste Management Revolving Fund. This fund is accounted for separately from the General Fund. Expenditure authority over the revolving fund is vested in the Secretary of the Department of Public Works. Revolving fund monies shall be available for expenditure without further appropriation and without fiscal year limitations.

Because tipping fees are already included in the Plan, this proposal was rejected.

- 9. “A dump truck is crucial for Rota’s diversion plan to transfer all green waste to Sinapalo’s green waste site, and scrap metals to the proposed metal processing facility, all from within Tatachok dump site.”**

A dump truck is included in the Plan as additional equipment for the Tatachok SCEL, as it is needed to properly operate and maintain the Tatachok SCEL.

Because a dump truck for the Tatachok SCEL is already included in the Plan, this proposal was rejected.

- 10. “I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Office of Planning and Development, the Department of Public Works, and all community members who have dedicated their time and effort to developing this comprehensive 5-year plan. Your hard work exemplifies the positive change we can achieve when we work**

together as a community to improve our environment. This plan, developed in collaboration with the Office of Planning and Development, the Department of Public Works, and the Offices of the Mayor from all three municipalities, outlines strategic actions for the next five years. It aims to effectively utilize the remaining \$56 million in ASADRA funding allocated to the CNMI — funds that are essential for tackling both immediate and long-term solid waste management challenges. With increasing DOD activities and upcoming infrastructure projects, establishing a sustainable waste system is more critical than ever to protect our environment and safeguard the health and well-being of our residents. Remember, solid waste management is a shared responsibility — it starts with each of us. Whether it's reducing waste, recycling effectively, or supporting sustainable practices, every action counts toward preserving the natural beauty of our islands and ensuring a healthier environment for future generations. Our commitment to responsible waste management is a continuous journey toward sustainability. It requires collective effort — from government agencies and community members to business owners and stakeholders alike. Thank you all for being here today. Your presence, insights, and feedback are essential in shaping the future of Tinian's solid waste management. Rest assured, your comments, concerns, and ideas will be carefully considered as we refine our plans and work toward practical solutions. Let's engage in a collaborative and constructive dialogue as we review the CNMI Comprehensive Integrated Solid Waste Plan. Together, we can develop effective strategies that protect our environment and enhance our community's quality of life."

The ISWMT extends its appreciation to the Office of the Mayor of Tinian and Aguiguan for its strong commitment to advancing solid waste and recycling efforts in the CNMI, and for its active participation throughout the development of the CNMI CISWMP. We look forward to continued collaboration in support of shared sustainability goals.

In addition, as a point of clarification, the CNMI did have \$56 million in funding through ASADRA. However, a portion of ASADRA funds have already been spent for projects, but most of it can not be expended until the CISWMP is formally approved. As such, that is our next step.

Because collaboration between the public sector, the private sector, and the general public; funding, DoD solid waste management activities, and solid waste management infrastructure projects are already addressed in the Plan, this proposal was rejected.

11. “With all of these federal happenings, is SWIFR secured? Can the municipality avail of those funds?”

The CNMI is pleased to have secured funding through a recent round of the SWIFR Grant Program to support metal recycling efforts in the municipality of Tinian and Aguiguan. This award will enable the procurement of a metal baler, enhancing local recycling capacity.

Because SWIFR projects are already addressed in the Plan, this proposal was rejected.

12. “Is there an ‘incinerator plan’ incorporated into this Solid Waste Plan?”

No. While incineration is recognized in the U.S. EPA’s waste management hierarchy as preferable to landfilling when energy is recovered, it ranks below waste reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting. The EPA encourages jurisdictions to consider these higher-priority strategies before pursuing incineration. For the CNMI, any consideration of incineration or waste-to-energy technologies must align with federal regulations and be subject to comprehensive environmental review, community engagement, and consistency with the CNMI’s integrated solid waste management goals.

Because the Plan does not currently provide an explanation of why an incinerator plan is not a priority project or program, this proposal was accepted. The Plan will be modified to provide an explanation of why an incinerator plan is not a priority.

13. “What would be more beneficial down the long run with the limited amount of funds that we might have? What [the U.S. military] is using right now [in terms of incineration] is permitted by [the Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality].”

Per the CNMI Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality Division of Environmental Quality Hazardous Waste Management Regulations, no disposal of hazardous waste by incineration or burning is allowed unless the operation is authorized in writing by U.S. EPA Region 9.

Because the Plan does not currently provide an explanation of why incineration is not a priority project or program, this proposal was accepted. The Plan will be modified to provide an explanation of why incineration is not a priority.

14. **“[The U.S. Department of Defense] also have waste-to-energy, which is in several discussions that we have because of the overflow of solid waste that’s going into our [federally noncompliant] dump right now is an issue. One of the discussions were using an incinerator that converts that waste into energy.”**

See response to Question 12.

15. **“A lot of the topics presented here were topics that we were shown [during the Conference on Island Sustainability] in Guam. One thing that I’d like to highlight are the tax incentives. I really do think that that’s going to be the most beneficial program, and also the education aspect, implementing [sustainable practices and programs] in schools. Lastly for education, I know [the ISWMT] is following the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. In Hawaii, they have this thing called the SDG Council implemented in high schools, where youth learn more about environmental sustainability and get to spread that information all throughout the world, and I think that’s something we can bring to the CNMI.”**

While a comprehensive outreach strategy is planned for development and implementation over the next five years, public education and outreach efforts are already underway, including collaborating with the municipal governments and the CNMI PSS to explore potential solid waste management programs.

Because tax incentives are already included in the Plan, the proposal on tax incentives is rejected. However, regarding public education and outreach to schools, please see the response to Question 4.

16. **“This is more of taking the opportunity to do a little outreach, coming from the person with the boots on the ground [at the Tinian Dump]. While everybody else is doing all the technical stuff, it’s got to start from somewhere, from us, the people that are out there. Start thinking about how you can reuse or maybe open a foundation. We always have typhoons here, Red Cross... they need stuff. If you have stuff that is still reusable, reach out to them. It’s got to start somewhere. Think about how you can reuse stuff.”**

While a comprehensive outreach strategy is planned for development and implementation over the next five years, public education and outreach efforts are already underway, including collaborating with the municipal governments to explore potential solid waste management programs.

Because public education and outreach is already included in the Plan, this proposal was rejected.

17. **“Advanced disposal fees being discussed as an option versus the current statute in the books. Which is more advantageous, given the competing interest [with] land area requirement and the funds needed to roll out best management practice for solid waste?”**

Per CNMI Public Law 11-122, the CNMI BECQ DEQ has the authority to develop Advanced Disposal Fees (ADFs) for specific materials deemed viable for diversion. Those items taxed under 4 CMC 1405 shall be exempt from any ADF under this Act. DEQ is authorized to evaluate those specific materials and develop a fee structure through regulation which will provide the proper economic support for diversion programs. In evaluating the benefits of diverting various materials from disposal, DEQ should consider the environmental and economic benefits for diversion, the existing and potential markets

for the material, and the existing collection and processing infrastructure. The evaluation should be based on criteria outlined in the Act. The DEQ shall promulgate rules and regulations for establishing a specific ADF program for each material. More information is provided in the Act.

Because the ADF program is already included in the Plan, this proposal was rejected.

18. “Incinerator; is this an option being considered? It’s a question to the panel.”

See response to Question 12.

19. “How many pages is the CISWMP?”

As of May 31, 2025, the Draft CNMI CISWMP spans approximately 175 pages. Efforts are ongoing to refine and streamline the document to enhance clarity, readability, and accessibility for a broad range of stakeholders.

Because page numbers are already included in the Plan, this proposal was rejected.

20. “Is the latest draft to the CISWMP publicly available?”

Yes. The latest draft of the CISWMP has been available for public consumption since April 1, 2025, via the CISWMP Information Hub hosted on the CNMI OPD website (<https://opd.gov.mp/ciswmp.html>).

Because the latest draft of the CISWMP has been available for public consumption on multiple platforms since April 1, 2025, this proposal was rejected.

21. “It was kind of unclear. You said something about equipment. Does that mean that the government is going into the disposal business or is that still going to be left to the private sector?”

The intention is for the government not to compete with the private sector but to be able to oversee the outsourcing and contracting out of some of the services that the government does not have adequate resources for. Government personnel are trained to be able to manage or augment the operations when there is a need to or to take over the work contracted out when the contracting situation requires it.

Because equipment, capacity building, and waste collection and transport are already included in the Plan, this proposal was rejected.

22. “You keep mentioning funding sources. Has that process begun or are you waiting until the final approval of this plan? Is there dialogue? Is there money there, really?”

The CNMI currently has existing rewards, namely ASADRA and SWIFR. A vast majority of the projects cited in the Plan will be funded through ASADRA, but some of the projects outside of the immediate priorities that will need further exploration for additional funding sources. A portion of ASADRA funds have already been spent for projects, but most of it can not be expended until the CISWMP is formally approved. As such, that is our next step.

Because funding sources are already included in the Plan, this proposal was rejected.

23. “The costs for priority projects on Tinian and Rota are unusually high.”

The cost breakdown per island for Fiscal Years 2026 to 2030 and adjusted estimates for inflation assume inflation will increase at a steady and flat three percent (3%).

Because inflation is already factored into cost estimates and included in the Plan, this proposal was rejected.

24. 3.3.2 Solid Waste Management Revolving Fund (SWMRF): Financial Assurance - This portion should be checked. The \$500,000 for the Financial Assurance should be deposited from the SWRF prior to the other 3 sub-accounts per senatorial districts.

once the \$500,000 is secured then the remaining monies should be divided by percentage into the other sub-accounts. With Tinian and Rota only receiving 10% respectively, taking monies from that little share will not allow the municipalities to operate their Solid Waste Facilities efficiently. The law does not state that \$500,000 will be taken from each senatorial districts sub-accounts. Please verify this information before publishing the CISWMP.

Per Title 2, Division 3, § 3551 of the Commonwealth Code, the CNMI Solid Waste Management Revolving Account Act of 2002, the Secretary of the Department of Finance shall allocate the Solid Waste Management Revolving Fund into four sub-accounts. Subject to the promulgation of appropriate rules and regulations prescribing CNMI-wide fees as described in subsection (b) of this law, three sub-accounts shall be established with one for each of the respective Senatorial Districts. The fourth sub-account shall be for financial assurance requirements for permitting facilities within the Commonwealth.

Per Title 155-30.1 of the Commonwealth Administrative Code, the solid waste revolving fund (SWRF) shall be divided pursuant to the Solid Waste Management Revolving Account Act of 2002 in the following manner:

(a) Saipan sub-account:

- (1) All solid waste tipping fees generated on the island of Saipan 80% of the total excise tax designated for SWRF
- (2) All solid waste grants applied for under the Saipan Solid Waste Office
- (3) All disposal fees collected for products to be sold on the island of Saipan
- (4) All loans, grants, or other financial assistance designated for activities to happen on the island of Saipan.

(b) Tinian sub-account:

- (1) All solid waste tipping fees generated on the island or islands of Tinian and Aguiguan
- (2) 10% of the total excise tax designated for the SWRF
- (3) All solid waste grants applied for under the Tinian Solid Waste Division

(4) Any disposal fees collected for products to be sold on the island or islands of Tinian and Aguiguan

(5) All loans, grants, or other financial assistance designated for activities to happen on the island or islands of Tinian and Aguiguan.

(c) Rota sub-account:

(1) All solid waste tipping fees generated on the island of Rota

(2) 10% of the total excise tax designated for the SWRF

(3) All solid waste grants applied for under the Rota Solid Waste Division

(4) All disposal fees collected for products to be sold on the island of Rota

(5) All loans, grants, or other financial assistance designated for activities to happen on the island of Rota.

(d) Financial assurance sub-account:

(1) \$500,000* per year out of the total excise tax designated for the SWRF. 10% will come from the excise tax funds apportioned for Rota, 10% will come from the excise tax funds apportioned for Tinian and 80% will come from the excise tax funds apportioned for Saipan.

(2) Once accumulated, a minimum of \$500,000.00 will be maintained in a savings account that can be accessed immediately. Any additional funds above \$500,000.00 will be maintained in TCD's or other higher interest bearing funds that can be accessed within a 90 day time period.

(3) Funds from this sub-account cannot be used for any other purpose except for the closure/post-closure or any corrective action that may be required for the Marpi Solid Waste Facility or a DEQ permitted landfill in Tinian, Aguiguan, or Rota.

(4) This amount will be annually re-evaluated and adjusted as necessary by the Department of Public Works, Division of Solid Waste Management, to account for updated closure and postclosure costs for the Marpi Solid Waste Facility and any landfill in Tinian or Rota permitted under the CNMI Solid Waste Management Regulations [NMIAC, title 65, chapter 80], as well as any corrective actions that may become required for these facilities under the CNMI Solid Waste Management Regulations.

Because the CNMI Solid Waste Management Revolving Account Act of 2002 is already included in the Plan, this proposal was rejected.

Evaluations

Upon the conclusion of each public hearing, the public was invited to evaluate the effectiveness of the public participation program. Below are evaluations received from the general public:

1. **“Try to simplify the document or any documents. Some people have low attention spans.”**
2. **“More details on every topic, like reusing of disposed solid waste.”**
3. **“All good. Great job on the presentation!”**
4. **“Great job!”**
5. **“Cross that bridge along the way if needed.”**
6. **“I believe you should summarize better and focus on public voice and input instead. Send out a summarized version to the public ahead of time. Explain those points during the public hearing. Have the public control the conversation and [the presenting team] answers. Have it be community-led, not data-focused! I like listening either way though!”**
7. **“Perfect!”**

During its June 17 meeting in the Governor’s Conference Room, the Planning and Development Advisory Council (PDAC) reviewed the public participation program and unanimously affirmed its effectiveness. A quorum was established with the presence of the Acting Director of the Office of Planning and Development (OPD); the Secretary of the Department of Public Works; the Secretary of the Department of Public Lands; the Secretary of the Department of Lands and Natural Resources; the Executive Director of the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC); the Executive Director of the Marianas Visitors Authority (MVA) – or their designees; and representatives from the Offices of the Mayors of Rota, Tinian and Aguiguan, and the Northern Islands.