

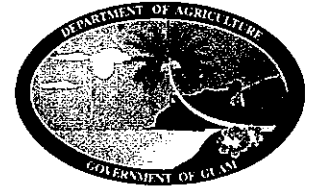


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Paul C. Bassler
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July 16, 2007

Mariana Islands Range Complex EIS
258 Makalapa Drive, Suite 100
Pearl Harbor, Hawaii 96860-3134
Attn: EV2

Subject: The Development of an Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement for the Mariana Islands Range Complex.

Dear Sir/Madam:

On June 18, 2007, the U.S Department of Defense Representatives (DODR) held a community meeting on Guam requesting comments on environmental factors for consideration in developing the Environment Impact Statement (EIS)/Overseas Environment Impact Statement (OEIS) for the Mariana Islands Range Complex (MIRC). The DODR proposed to support current, emerging, and future military activities in the MIRC as a necessity to achieving and sustaining military readiness. These activities include military training; research, development, testing and evaluation of systems, weapons, and platforms; and enhancing range resources and range infrastructure.

Our comments address the concerns of the Guam Department of Agriculture (Department) in regard to the MIRC. The Department requests that its comments be addressed in the development of the Draft EIS/Draft OEIS (DEIS/DOEIS) and in the Final EIS/Final OEIS (FEIS/FOEIS). Further, the DEIS/DOEIS needs to address separately the impacts to natural resources from impacts to other areas of concern such as infrastructure, socioeconomics, etc. As the Department has not been provided detailed information on the MIRC, our comments remain general and may not elucidate fully the concerns that need to be addressed in the DEIS/DOEIS. We offer the following comments for consideration in the DEIS/DOEIS.

1. Proposed Action and Alternatives

Information provided to develop an EIS/OEIS on the proposed action and its alternatives is either lacking in detail or entirely absent. The handouts provided contained only general statements and did not include detailed information for the Department to make proper comments. Among information missing are the locations for training. In addition, the handouts only focus on the preferred alternative #2. The DEIS/DOEIS should not solely concentrate on this preferred alternative and needs to describe, in detail, the other possible alternatives for the MIRC and its impacts to each island in the Marianas.

Cumulative Impacts

The cumulative impacts (direct, indirect, and secondary) of all past, present, and future projects affecting the marine and terrestrial environment should be addressed in the DEIS/DOEIS (Alpha and Bravo Wharves' Improvement; Kilo Wharf Extension; Red Horse Squadron; Beddown of Training and Support Initiatives at Northwest Field, Andersen Air Force Base (AAFB); Establishment and Operation of an Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Strike Capability (ISR/Strike) at AAFB; Proposed Munitions Storage Igloos Construction at AAFB; and others). The cumulative impacts of all these projects must be thoroughly considered in order to ascertain the impact of this proposed action. The DEIS/DOEIS needs to include a comprehensive and detailed description on all projects and their impacts to the Mariana Islands' natural resources associated with the MIRC. This can be demonstrated in a table or other means by showing the amount of actual or estimated impacted areas quantified in units such as acres. These cumulative impacts should not only address the marine and terrestrial environment but, in separate reports, impacts to socioeconomics, land use, infrastructure, etc.

Marine Resources

The Department recommends that DODR confer with us regarding marine mammals and reptiles. The use of sonar has been proven to have a negative effect on marine mammals under certain conditions. The Navy must take proactive, protective measures to avoid such conditions that could harm or injure marine mammals. The DEIS/DOEIS needs to include detailed methods used to take protective measures against such incidents. We also require that if marine mammals were detected near the vicinity of training, a written report summarizing the situation and the condition of the mammal be sent to the Department for records.

Additionally, the risk of damage to essential fish habitat (EFH) from vessel groundings will be higher due to increased vessel traffic. The Department should be consulted for locations of EFH and how to avoid damage. Also, DODR needs to be familiar with the locations of Department deployed fishing aids such as fish aggregating devices (FADs) and shallow water moorings (SWMs) to ensure no negative interactions with military vessels. The Department also requests to review DODR's plans for handling fuel or oil spills within Guam's territorial waters.

The information, via handouts, available at the public scoping meeting indicated that the waterfront-training site would be in Apra Harbor, at the Polaris Point Field. The Navy should be aware that the waterfront site at the Polaris Point Field is within the Sasa Bay Marine Preserve. Training should be avoided within the Sasa Bay Marine Preserve to avoid impacts to the marine environment.

Many of the proposed actions will take place in areas frequented by local fishermen as well as commercial and private dive boats. Extreme care must be taken in order to ensure no negative

interactions occur between the military and civilians. The Department wants to see a plan with notification procedures and contingency plans in case a private boat is in an area in which exercises are taking place.

Direct, Indirect, and Secondary Impacts to Protected Species and Resources

Guam's native terrestrial fauna has been negatively impacted by the introduced brown treesnake (*Boiga irregularis*). As a result, many species are extinct on Guam and others exist in low numbers or are in captive breeding programs. The majority of species are listed locally and/or federally as endangered or threatened. The DEIS/DOEIS needs to address impacts to threatened and endangered species (T&E), including impacts to habitat deemed essential to their recovery. The DEIS/DOEIS must address how the MIRC will limit or prevent the repatriation of locally and/or federally listed T&E species on Department of Defense property on Guam. DODR must also address impacts from MIRC on other federally listed species such as the Mariana common moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus guami*) and the Mariana swiftlet (*Aerodramus bartschi*) as well as migratory birds and Guam's remaining native gastropods and insects.

5. Protected and Endangered Marine Reptile

The Department recommends that DODR confer with us regarding marine reptile species such as sea turtles and their nests. Currently, there are at least three, possibly four; different areas within Apra Harbor (i.e. Sunay Marina, Spanish Steps adjacent to Kilo Wharf heading towards Orote Point, and Port Authority property between sea plane ramp and Port Authority Beach) where green and hawksbill sea turtles nest sites have been documented. Sea turtles are federally and locally listed and DODR must ensure that their habitat, both at sea and nesting, does not get disturbed with MIRC. No training should occur within sea turtle nesting areas at all to avoid disturbing and impacting sea turtle nesting activities and areas.

6. Brown Treesnake and other Invasive Species

The Notice of Intent 'Rota and Saipan Training' indicated the need to strictly inspect all cargo leaving Guam to avoid the introduction of brown treesnakes to other islands such as Rota, Saipan and Tinian. DODR must assure that consistent funding is available to sustain the 100% inspection rate of all cargo, vehicle, munitions, and other items departing from Guam. In addition, DODR needs to fund brown treesnake control and eradication research to eliminate the constant threat of this species to other islands. The DEIS/DOEIS and the FEIS/FOEIS need to include in appendices a Brown Treesnake Control Plan, which ensures that the orders to inspect cargo meet Regulation 505 and 506 from the DOD Defense Transportation Regulation. DODR must also assure that a biosecurity plan for other islands be drafted, reviewed, and approved by the Department and U.S.D.A. – Wildlife Services, and implemented in order to reduce the likelihood of introducing invasive species to the other islands. Written reports need to be submitted to the Department indicating vital information such as actual man hours for inspection and the actual number of cargo inspected before and after transporting.

Guam's terrestrial fauna and flora have been decimated by introduced species. With increased vessel traffic to Guam and the Marianas, the risk for introduction of invasive species is increased. A major source of aquatic introductions in other parts of the Pacific Ocean has been ballast water from incoming vessels. The Department would like to see this and other issues

addressed in the Navy's plans for reducing the risk of introduction of exotic marine organisms to Guam and the northern Mariana Island's inshore waters.

Access and Biological Assessments

It is understood that DODR will conduct biological assessments. The Department would need access to conduct its own biological assessments of the project areas related to the proposed action and its alternatives. Independent assessments by the local and federal trust agencies may need to be conducted to assist in the decision to determine alternatives or compensatory mitigation. Impacts to corals, forest, wildlife, endangered and threatened species, and associated biological communities are factors considered by the Department in determining the preferred alternative. The Department has difficulty with access to Department of Defense property in order to conduct biological assessments. The Department would like DODR to commit to allowing the local and federal resource agencies access to project areas. Also, adequate time must be allowed to assure accurate collection of data and impact assessment. This would be beneficial in the decision on a preferred alternative. Furthermore, DODR should consider funding NOAA Pacific Island Fisheries Science Center's Coral Reef Ecosystem Division to complete the Marianas Archipelagic Monitoring Report from the MARAMP cruise. The report includes monitoring and mapping information within Apra Harbor and other submerged lands that the DODR claims.

GPS coordinates and GIS Mapping

The Department recommends that GPS coordinates along with a GIS map be used for activities and actions resulting in direct impacts (i.e. dredge footprint, clearing of forest, storage areas, anchors, etc.). This will assist resource agencies and the public in reviewing and providing comments, as we will have a better understanding of the actual locations of the marine or terrestrial environment being impacted. GPS coordinates and GIS mapping is a tool essential for resources agencies to conduct site inspections in project areas.

Permit

The Department is the local trust agency mandated to protect corals and associated biological communities on Guam (5 Guam Code Annotated Chapter 63, 48 USC Chapter 15 §1704). A permit needs to be obtained from the Department for the removal of corals and the clearing of terrestrial habitats prior to the commencement of any projects.

Compensatory Mitigation of Unavoidable Impacts

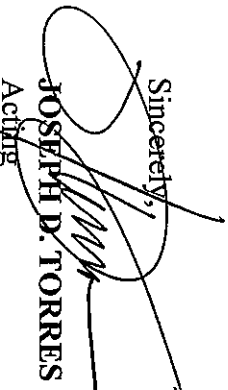
The Department requests that collaboration with all resource agencies of the Government of Guam in determining appropriate compensatory mitigation commensurate to unavoidable losses or impacts to Guam's natural resources. The Department recommends that a "Habitat Equivalency Analysis" (HEA) or other equivalent models be used to determine appropriate compensatory mitigation for the loss of coral reef habitat. The same type of analysis or equivalent can be applied to the terrestrial ecosystem. Furthermore, compensatory mitigation for the loss of services and functions of coral reef resources and terrestrial resources is separate from infrastructure impacts. A common misconception is that compensatory mitigation for loss of these resources can be used to improve infrastructure.

DODR needs to honor, implement, and fund mitigation measure(s) related to the loss of the coral reefs and terrestrial ecosystems as agreed upon between the DODR and the Government of Guam natural resource agencies. Appropriate compensatory mitigation should have a long-term benefit to the ecosystem. The Department feels that a long-term, inherent benefit is needed because the impacts to coral reefs and terrestrial ecosystems will be permanent. The loss of coral reef resources as a result of the proposed action may be best mitigated in areas outside the harbor area, if such mitigation measures are only to be negated by future actions. The Department prefers offsite compensatory mitigation. With the continued increase of military projects, it does not seem feasible to mitigate within DOD's properties. The Government of Guam natural resources agencies and the Department of Navy (DON) have been working on a watershed/reforestation approach as compensatory mitigation to offset the loss of ecological services to coral reefs for other DOD projects. The Department recommends that the watershed approach be continued with projects resulting in the loss of coral reef resources. The mitigation measure(s) need to be included in the DEIS/DOEIS, as well as in the Final EIS/OEIS to ensure the measures are funded and implemented. The Department requests active participation with the Navy in deciding on the mitigation measures. However, the Department is not in support of mooring buoys or artificial reefs as compensatory mitigation.

Cooperation Between Resource Agency and U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM), U.S. Pacific Fleet (PACFLT), and U.S. Department of Defense Representatives (DODR)

The Department highly encourages that PACOM, PACFLT, and DODR work, cooperate, and meet with the Department throughout the project. Any new information concerning the project needs to be provided to the Department. This would ensure that the process to develop the DEIS/DOEIS and FEIS/FOEIS fully addresses the natural resource concerns of Guam.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to provide comments for the development of the EIS/OEIS and looks forward to having our concerns addressed. Further, the Department anticipates to be cooperatively working and collaborating with the DODR, as well as with federal and local resource partners, on these proposed projects. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Celestino Aguon or Jay Gutierrez at 735-3955/56, both with the Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

JOSEPH D. TORRES
Acting

cc: Bureau of Statistics and Plans, Guam Coastal Management Program (GCMP)
Civilian Military Task Force (CMTF)/Environment Subcommittee
Guam Environmental Protection Agency (GEPA)
NAVFAC Marianas
NOAA, Pacific Islands Regional Office
U S Army Corps of Engineers (Frank Dayton)
U S Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Ecological Services, Honolulu