

2/17/12

Does it do any good to provide comments on proposed regulations, federal or local? Is it worth making comments at meetings where public input is asked for? A friend, in response to a statement that had been submitted to a federal agency call for comments noted that " It's [submitting comments] an influential step in the process that many just don't make time for (or don't believe in). I've seen first hand how influential comments can change entire processes, so value these sorts of things."

There have been several opportunities, of late, to offer comments, input - on the National Ocean Policy Council's Implementation Plan, a wordy bureaucratic piece full of redundancy and overlap < <http://www.whitehouse.gov/oceans/> >; on U.S. Fish and Wildlife's climate change adaptation strategy, in contrast, a well-written easy-to-read paper offering sound steps towards ecosystem sustainability regardless of whether one believes in climate change or not < www.wildlifeadaptationstrategy.gov >; on a proposal before the Zoning Board to establish a zip-line tourist attraction (no reports available yet)....

More opportunities are coming: on February 24, a "scoping" session on the Marianas Marine Trench Monument at the Susupe Multi-Purpose Center from 6:00-8:00 p.m., and beginning on February 28 through March 6, a series of meetings of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (WestPac) and its various committees. It's a little difficult to sort out - WestPac is not known for being user-friendly. See, for example, < <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-02-06/html/2012-2609.htm> >.

Worth noting: among the issues on the agenda of WestPac's Regional Ecosystems Advisory Committee meeting on March 2: an update on the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, a report on the Monument Advisory Committee, and the proposed monument fishing regulations. Unfortunately, a copy of the proposed regulations does not seem to be available.

The draft regulations are again to be discussed on Saturday, March 3, at the Mariana Archipelago and Pacific Pelagic Fishery Ecosystem Plans Advisory Panel meeting, and as an action item at the meeting of the full Council on March 5-6.

Not knowing what is being proposed in the federal regulations makes it all the more important that anyone with any interest in the monument attend the meetings.

It may not be possible to participate in all government's policy- and decision-making, but when given the chance, isn't it better to offer input than to sit on the sidelines?

The discovery that though Saipan has yet to succeed in becoming a haven for elderly tourists - despite much grandiose verbiage about its potential - it has become a success as a safe place for Chinese to have second children - without any effort on the part of any government agency or official - is ironic indeed! Makes one wonder what other accidental/incidental tourist niches the CNMI has to offer - that could be developed with equal ease (read: absence of government intervention/interference).

The Chinese are bringing revenue to the CNMI - paying their hospital and hotel bills, spending money on related activities. They do not incur costs to the government, do not stay here. Since it would appear that no laws are broken in the process, is there any reason why the CNMI should not now promote and encourage the whole idea?

The real question is whether the government and the legislature, the various related agencies, can keep their hands off, and not now come up with all sorts of taxes, fees, service charges, or, heaven help us all, regulations, to levy against those involved.....

Short takes:

- Not to beat a dead horse, but.... Last week's column noted that of the approximately 100 active members of the CNMI Bar Association, about 50 work for the government, leaving about 50 in private practice. A Bar Association member noted, "That's about one lawyer for every thousand people, not an outrageous number." But one cannot exclude those 50 who work for the government. They too, theoretically, are working for the people. With 100 lawyers for 53,000 people, to divide by five in order to make it comparable to a table published by Avery Index at > http://www.averyindex.com/lawyers_per_capita.php > (a company that provides independent law firm rankings for use by law students and practitioners in their career decisions) would make it 20 lawyers per 10,000 people. As a reader noted, that number does get pretty outrageous when one compares it to the finding that New York State, with a population of 19,378,102, for example, has almost the same - 20.4 attorneys for every 10,000 people - while California, with a population of 37,253,956, has only 10.9, and North Dakota, with a population of 672,591 and South Dakota, with a population of 814,180, have only 4.4 and 5.8 attorneys per 10,000 residents, respectively.
- Another reader wrote that "Rather than recommending that folks shop online (read: off-island) for solar power supplies, you might wish to point them to local vendors who offer these resources, such as Atdao Systems, Pacific Wind & Solar & Spectrum Electric (in the yellow pages of the phone directory under "Solar Energy Equipment & Supplies) [and North Pacific Enterprises, Inc. in the other phone book] or Joeten Superstore and Ace Hardware for garden solar lights and small panel systems." Mea culpa, mea culpa. But if they don't advertise, how is one supposed to know?
- Nit-picking: One isn't supposed to rely solely on the printed word for one's information, but it doesn't help when figures don't match, or logic isn't there to begin with. For example, an article in one of the local papers about the FAA reauthorization bill that passed Congress this week noted that "The bill had 30 proposed amendments; 14 were accepted, while 10 were rejected." OK. That makes 24. What happened to the other 6? Another nit: A report of a court case states that a probationer was sentenced to seven months in jail in January 2011, and was to be placed on supervised release thereafter. Then it states that "He has been under supervised release since Jan. 8, 2010." So, did he never serve his seven months in jail?
- It's all well and good that women are being encouraged to learn how to defend themselves, but to tie an attempted rape to a murder ten days later in which no rape was involved and call it a crime wave ("back-to-back rape and homicide") is somewhat of an exaggeration, to put it mildly. Our sympathies go out to the victims and their families, but nonetheless, we see no need to incite the public, to evoke a general fear across the island, on the basis of these two events. There would appear no connection between them, to begin with. It's not clear whether or when either perpetrator will be identified, apprehended, but beating the drums about it all probably doesn't help.....
- Both papers ran sensitive reporter-written (as opposed as to paid) obituaries today, the *Marianas Variety* about Bob Kenney, the *Saipan Tribune* about George Joseph "Keoki" Sablan.

It's a practice not often followed, but one we'd encourage both to follow more often. Particularly for the non-local, like yours truly, it's sometimes difficult to sort people out based on the formal obituary notices. The stories help put them in context.

- We mourn the passing of both men, and offer our sympathy to both families. While I don't recall ever meeting George J. Sablan, I do know his parents. I had met Bob Kenney several times over the years. What an icon he was! Though I did not know him well, the memory of his storied rope-swinging jumps into the Grotto, his concern for the youth of the CNMI, shall linger long and strong.