

Views and Opinions of Japan's Fisheries Industry

Damanaki visit to JFA

Shirasu, Damanaki agree to cooperate
in eliminating IUU fishing

European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Maria Damanaki exchanged views with Japan Fisheries Association (JFA) President Toshiro Shirasu at the JFA office in Tokyo on July 11 concerning the common fisheries issues facing Japan and the European Union (EU), centering on the elimination of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing activities.

Before the meeting with Shirasu, Damanaki had signed a joint statement on the approaches to IUU fishing with Japan's Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Akira Gunji.

Damanaki's meeting with Shirasu was conducted in a friendly mood, with Shirasu offering Japanese tea and Damanaki saying she loves its fragrance very much.

Damanaki stressed that it is crucial both for Japan and the EU to join forces in eliminating IUU fishing practices. IUU fishing, she said, not only harms fishery resources but also causes damage to fishermen who are operating in full compliance with fisheries regulations.

Noting that Japan and the EU members are both fishing and fish consuming countries, the European leader stated that efforts to check IUU fishing from the consumptive side will be highly effective. The axis of activities for both parties is to grant "passports" to the fish caught legally. The EU agreed with the Japanese government on collaborating toward this goal, she said.

As a new fisheries policy, the EU is presenting a proposal for preserving the sustainability of fishery resources and fishing activities. The EU is trying to convince fishermen that they can recover their current investments by ensuring sustainability. EU fishing vessels are obliged to operate in compliance with EU rules in areas outside the EU as well. International cooperation is essential for the implementation of such regulations, Damanaki said.

Shirasu observed that the true cause of IUU fishing activities can be found in the overcapacity of fishing vessels. In the international community, it is recognized that the overcapacity is created by the move to build large-scale purse-seine fishing vessels and the



Damanaki (right) and Shirasu exchange each other's books.

promotion of catch efficiency. He noted that the tuna regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) recommended at their recent joint meeting the freezing of the capacity of large-scale purse-seine fishing vessels. He said he is interested to know what kinds of measures the EU will take with regard to this recommendation.

Further, Shirasu drew Damanaki's attention to the plight of Japanese fishermen who are suffering from the repercussions of radioactive pollution in the wake of the great earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan in March last year. Rigorous monitoring surveys are being conducted in Japan, giving utmost attention to ensuring the safety of seafood. He requested the EU Commissioner's understanding of this effort and cooperation for an early resumption of Japanese seafood exports to the EU.

Regarding the purse-seine issue, Damanaki made clear the EU's policy of not increasing the capacity of large-scale purse-seine fishing vessels from the present level. As a step to implement this policy, the EU will abolish the subsidy for constructing new purse-seine fishing vessels.

She also said that the EU is considering making fishing rights transferable with the aim to achieve a balance based on the market principle.

With respect to the issue of the EU's import restriction on Japanese seafood, Damanaki said that she visited Onagawa in Miyagi Prefecture and other areas affected by the earthquake and tsunami and confirmed that supply of safe fish is ensured through a good monitoring

program. It is necessary to take appropriate measures against negative rootless rumors based on objective information and data, she said, adding that the EU's import regulation will be reviewed in September.

Before closing the meeting, Damanaki requested Japan's participation in an international meeting on overcapacity the EU plans to hold in Brussels next year.

East Japan Disaster

A Year After the East Japan Earthquake/Tsunami

Restoration of fisheries in the disaster area is the key to regional recovery

More than a year has passed since the great earthquake and tsunami attacked the northeastern Pacific coast of Japan on March 11, 2011. During the past year, the mass media in Japan has been reporting in various ways about the memories of the disaster and efforts toward restoration. The Japan Fisheries Association (JFA) prepared a special feature on the disaster in the May and June issues of its Japanese-language publicity bulletin, "Suisankai." In this issue of ISARIBI, we present a partial summary of this report in the hope to express gratitude to the people who gave support for the restoration, both from Japan and overseas, and also to seek understanding of the readers around the world about the long and arduous journey toward rehabilitation that await fishermen of the disaster-hit area.

Nearly one and a half years have passed since the great earthquake and tsunami occurred in the area along the northern Japan Pacific coast, called Sanriku, in March last year, causing unbearable hardship to many residents and fishermen.

The natural calamity left tremendous scars: more than 15,000 people died, and the society and economy, centering on coastal fishing communities and the fishing industry, were dealt a catastrophic blow. In many places the restoration of fishing ports, fish markets and fishery processing facilities has not yet even started, exposing the vast magnitude of the disaster.

Under such difficult circumstances, residents, officials of local autonomies and those in the fishing industry have made arduous and enduring efforts for the rehabilitation and recovery of the fishing industry. All concerned, including the government, private corporations, non-profit organizations, the fisheries industry and citizens, extended assistance from their respective standpoints to rehabilitate the affected region.

The earthquake and tsunami that occurred last year were characterized by the vastly-spread damage in the coastal areas because of the enormous strength of the tsunami. The damage was concentrated on fisheries and aquaculture and its related infrastructure such as fishing ports, markets, fishery product processing facilities and shipbuilding yards.

Industries in the affected region are mostly related to fisheries in some way or another, including seafood processing and distribution, shipbuilding, transportation, retailing, and tourism. Many local residents had been employed in these industries. In this sense, it is no exaggeration to say that restoration of the affected region is tantamount to the restoration of fisheries.

Looking back a year from March 11, 2011

1. Occurrence of the great earthquake and tsunami

At 2:46 p.m. on Friday, March 11, 2011, the giant earthquake of a magnitude 9.0, the greatest scale on record, occurred with the epicenter in the area off Sanriku. The earthquake induced a great tsunami which assaulted fishing cities and towns, fishing ports and communities along the Pacific coast of the Tohoku Region, northern Japan, claiming the lives of many people and causing catastrophic destruction of the area.

2. Damage by the tsunami

A large part of the damage by the disaster was brought about by the massive tsunami, with destruction concentrating along the seaside area.

According to the announcement by the National Police Agency on April 4, 2012, the death toll was estimated to have reached 15,856, with 3,084 missing and 6,025 injured. Totally destroyed houses amounted to 129,489 units and partly destroyed ones reached 255,652 units. Roads were demolished at 3,938 locations, with 78 bridges broken down. Landslides occurred in 205 locations and 45 embankments were torn down.

The Government's Cabinet Office estimated that the overall damage value reached Yen16.9 trillion, of which agriculture, forestry and fisheries accounted for Yen1.9 trillion. Notably, damage to fisheries exceeded Yen1.2 trillion. Catastrophic blows occurred to the infrastructure of fisheries cities and towns, centering on the Pacific coast prefectures of Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, with fisheries-related infrastructure including fishing vessels, fishing ports, aquaculture facilities, markets and seafood processing plants. Fishing communities and fishing

grounds also suffered devastating losses.

Most of the fishing vessels destroyed were coastal vessels of less than five tons. Also ravaged were large-type vessels licensed by the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, which were based in the ports along the Sanriku coast. Interview surveys with fishing organizations related to saury fishing, squid jigging, purse-seine and bottom trawling indicated that 176 out of 1,575 fishing vessels belonging to their members were utterly destroyed.

Importance of fisheries production in Sanriku

When we look at the weight of fisheries production of the three Tohoku prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima—three of the seven prefectures that were affected—marine fishery production in these prefectures accounted for 440,000 tons, or 11% of the overall national production, with aquaculture production totaling 176,000 tons, or 16%. Thus fisheries/aquaculture production in the three prefectures combined exceeded 10% of the national total. Tuna production accounted for 15%, with marlins at 28%, sharks 54%, saury 26%, Pacific cod 44%, and abalone 31%. In aquaculture, oysters held 26%, sea squirt 95%, kombu kelp 37% and wakame seaweed 74%. The above figures show that there are a number of species that held high proportions in the national production.

Further, a number of fishing ports held top landing volumes for major species in Japan. Kesenuma in Miyagi Prefecture, for example, ranked top in landings of fresh skipjack tuna. Onagawa, also in Miyagi, topped in landings of saury on Japan's main island, Honshu.

This shows that the Sanriku coast provided important landing ports and bases to fishing vessels from other areas that operate off Sanriku—an area having rich fisheries productivity.

Concentration of fishery product processing

Another important characteristic of the Sanriku area was the huge concentration of fish processing facilities in close proximity to the fishing ports so that landings and processing are closely linked to each other. A

supply chain had been established, which linked fisheries production with landings, processing, and distribution to consuming markets.

In Kesenuma, for instance, many processors were engaged in the processing of tuna (including skipjack and marlin) as well as shark fin products and wakame seaweed and a variety of canned fish. In point of fact more than 70% of the 70,000 people in the city were related to fisheries in some way or other. These—processing plants, cold-store warehouses and chilling equipment—supporting the employees were all swept away by the tsunami, inflicting serious losses to the city's economy.

Fisheries are thus located at the center of the Sanriku area's economy. It is not an exaggeration to say that all the industries in the region—including fisheries production, processing, distribution, marketing, tourism and local gift making—are related to fisheries to various extents. Therefore, while landing volume and value in the three prefectures are said to have occupied about 10% of the overall national volume and value, the share of fishery processing could have reached 30% of the overall output. All these were lost after the earthquake and tsunami.

Position of fisheries in the Sanriku region in Japan

As stated above, it is obvious that fisheries along the coast of Sanriku have a significant importance in Japan's fisheries—not only the catch but also aquaculture and processing. Therefore, it will become extremely difficult for the fisheries industry to fulfill its mission of ensuring a stable supply of seafood to the Japanese people unless the fisheries in the disaster-hit Sanriku recover.

Furthermore, if the fisheries remain crippled and the fishery resources in this area are left unused, it will lead to losses on a national scale from the perspective of a stable supply of seafood to the people. It is no exaggeration to say there will be no progress for Japan's fisheries without the rehabilitation and restoration of the fisheries in the earthquake-stricken region.

(This article continues in the next issue of ISARIBI)

MEL Japan News



MEL Japan -labeled products make appearance at mass retailers

To date MEL Japan-marked products have been sold at events such as the Stardust Shrimp Festival or the Pole-and-line Skipjack Fair. However, such occasions were of limited nature.

But, at long last, the way was paved for selling MEL Japan-labeled seafood widely. With the coming of the early summer skipjack season, some major department stores and mass retailers in Japan began marketing MEL Japan products.

Ginza Mitsukoshi

The first marketer was Mitsukoshi Department Store which sponsored the "Kochi Prefecture Fair," April 25-May 1, at its store in Ginza, the best-known and most fashionable shopping quarters in Tokyo.

On such an occasion, it is customary to exhibit the prefecture's products with the attendance of the producers from the prefecture. In the case of Mitsukoshi, however, permanent stall tenants of Mitsukoshi sold products using

the prefecture's commodities. Yoshikawa Suisan Co., a tenant stall selling fresh fish, proposed to Mitsukoshi to offer the skipjack caught by trolling line fishery in Kochi prefecture as a bargain product of the fair, knowing that the fishery has obtained the MEL Japan certification.

Kenji Suzuki, an assistant buyer of Yoshikawa Suisan, said: "I would like to communicate to our customers that fishermen are making efforts to manage the resources. I wanted customers to know that fishermen are not greedy hunters who just want to catch and sell their products. Many of our ethical customers felt joy in knowing that they are contributing to the conservation of the environment through their purchase of fish or meat. We may have to provide higher-level information on the products, not only on tastiness or good quality."



Photos: Displays of MEL Japan-labeled products at major retail stores. From top: Ginza Mitsukoshi (by courtesy of THE SUI-KEI); Daiei, and Okuwa (THE SUIKEI).

Jun Fukui, chief of Yoshikawa Suisan's fish section at Ginza Mitsukoshi, observed that "skipjack caught by trolling line fisher has high quality as the fish is handled with special care. We would like to support producers by publicizing MEL Japan." He said that the store will continue to attach the MEL Japan-label as long as the products are made available.

Okuwa

Okuwa is a mass retailer operating in eight western Japanese prefectures mainly in Wakayama (the other seven are Osaka, Nara, Mie, Hyogo, Aichi and Gifu). It started sales of MEL Japan-certified frozen skipjack caught by the distant-water pole-and-line fishery at all of its 172 outlets from May 1. This marked the first full-scale sales of MEL Japan-labeled products at a mass retailer.

Daiei

Daiei Inc., a major nationwide supermarket chain, started from May 19 sales of MEL Japan-labeled distant-water pole-and-line caught skipjack at its 76 direct sales outlets in the Kanto region centering on Tokyo.

Isao Takazawa, chief merchandiser of the company's fish section, talked about the background of introducing MEL Japan-labeled products as follows: "The state of fishery resources is now deteriorating, and skipjack is no exception. Distributors have so far been indifferent to the state of the resources, but if the present situation continues, the seafood business may not be able to stand, with the fish diet possibly collapsing. We have been enhancing public awareness toward the environmental issues, including the acquisition of ISO. Against this backdrop, we decided to deal with seafood handled with appropriate concern to the stock status."

Daiei's move was prompted by the fact that Minami Shokuhin Co., which has supplied skipjack products to Daiei for about 30 years, has obtained MEL Japan certification.

Daiei envisages expanding sales of MEL Japan-labeled products to its 204 direct outlets throughout Japan from June.

Topics

Japan's seafood imports in FY2011 on an uptrend again

Japan's seafood imports in fiscal 2011 (April 2011-March 2012) increased 2.7% from the previous year to 2,769,294 tons worth Yen1,496.7 billion, up 7.3% in value, according to import clearance statistics made public by the Finance Ministry.

The top three commodities in terms of value were shrimp at 204,948 tons worth Yen176,375.38 million, tunas at 2.78 million tons worth about Yen170 billion, and salmon at 266,006 tons worth Yen160,889.54 million.

Japan's seafood imports had been on a decline from year to year from a peak of 3.82 million tons in 2001, but showed an upturn again in 2010 to 2.6 million tons and continued growth in 2011 as well.