

**Japan
Fisheries
Association**

ISARIBI
漁火
Fishing Fire

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Views and Opinions of Japan's Fisheries Industry



Japan discusses major issues of importance at recent ICFA Annual Meeting

The International Coalition of Fisheries Associations (ICFA), the largest non-governmental organization of the world's fisheries industry, held its annual meeting in Rome, October 17-18. During this period, ICFA also had an informal exchange of views with the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Given below are the meeting's major agenda items, centering on issues of special importance for Japan's fisheries industry.

1. Restoration of the area stricken by the massive earthquake and tsunami in March 2011 and the control of damage caused by negative rootless rumors on the nuclear power plant accident

At the outset of his presentation, Toshiro Shirasu, president of the Japan Fisheries Association who headed the Japanese delegation, expressed gratitude to the countries and ICFA members for their assistance for the distressed areas. He also noted his appreciation for ICFA's adoption of the Resolution to Support Restoration of the Japanese Seafood Industry Affected by the Mega Earthquake and Tsunami, and its submission to the FAO during the 13th session of the FAO Sub-Committee on Fish Trade held in February last year. Subsequently, Shirasu reported on the actions Japan has taken since last year for restoration from the disaster and requested continued cooperation. ICFA members highly valued the efforts made by Japan.

The losses caused by the disaster amounted to 1.3 trillion yen--a figure comparable to Japan's overall fishery landing value of 1.4 trillion yen and Japan's seafood import value of 1.3 trillion yen.



Shirasu (center on the far side) addresses ICFA meeting

Almost all the damage--a loss of about 1 trillion yen (about 10 billion US dollars)--has been covered under the government's budget. However, although the budget for the restoration was allocated, actual restoration and rehabilitation processes have not been advanced as smoothly as expected because the administrative mechanisms of the local autonomies and fisheries organizations have been seriously disrupted, prices for construction materials increased, and there was a labor shortage.

Regarding the recovery of the fisheries sector, thanks to the financial assistance by the government, the fishing ports have been repaired to the extent possible, and fishing vessels--mostly small type vessels--have been largely rehabilitated.

As a result of such efforts, fish landings have recovered to 60% or 80% of their level in 2010, the period before the Tsunami.

Nevertheless, the rehabilitation of processing facilities, for instance refrigeration and chilling

equipment, has been in delay. The reason for the slow recovery is that processors have lost their markets due to lost production for two years, which weakened their motivation to bounce back. In addition, enterprises have been in a difficult situation burdened with past loans and unable to bear additional costs.

In this regard, the keys to accelerate the recovery of the fisheries sector are (1) to increase domestic seafood consumption and (2) to expand seafood exports.

Negative rootless rumors about the impact of the nuclear power plant accident

As a serious obstacle to the promotion of domestic seafood consumption and expansion of seafood exports, there still exist persistent rootless negative rumors about Japanese seafood because of the accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant. It is regrettable to see that a certain country is enforcing a total import ban on seafood from affected prefectures, regardless of whether the seafood actually contains radioactive substances.

As explained last year, rigorous monitoring is being carried out on seafood from the disaster-stricken areas. All-inclusive measures are being taken so that any fish found to have radioactivity above the benchmark level in monitoring surveys will not be supplied to the market.

Specifically,

- i) No fishing operation is taking place in the area near the Fukushima Power Plant;
- ii) Monitoring surveys are conducted so that any fish with radioactivity above the benchmark will not be supplied to the market; and
- iii) The Japanese benchmark value of 100 Becquerel of radioactive cesium is the most rigorous standard in the world.

Based on the above observations, Shirasu renewed his request for understanding and continued cooperation from ICFA members with regard to the promotion of imports of Japanese seafood to their countries.

In this connection, it should be noted that after the ICFA annual meeting, Masanori Miyahara, Deputy Director-General of the Fisheries Agency of Japan, explained at the Foreign Press Center in Tokyo on October 13 that a carefully thought-out inspection and monitoring system is now being implemented to ensure the safety of seafood distributed in Japan. He emphasized that the Japanese government is making every effort to eliminate damage caused by rootless negative rumors, saying that scientific data on fish from the affected areas is continuously made public and the agency is ready to respond to any

questions that may be raised from consumers.

2. Proposed resolution on fisheries and food security

Japan proposed that an ICFA resolution be developed on fisheries and food security urging the FAO to make greater efforts in the promotion of world food security, noting that as a common issue to many other agenda items, the importance of the fisheries industry to the world's food security is not fully recognized while the conservation movement is taking a course towards extremism. Japan's proposal was backed by other ICFA members, and it was agreed that ICFA will initiate an effort to develop such a resolution in the years ahead. ISARIBI will again report on this matter when the resolution is adopted by ICFA.

3. Conservation of tuna resources

(1) Pacific bluefin tuna

On this issue, Shirasu said he would like to share with other ICFA members Japan's concern regarding bluefin tuna fisheries in the Pacific and seek their understanding.

He elaborated as follows:

-Japan catches about 70% of the Pacific bluefin tuna catch and consumes about 80% of the world supply, and, therefore, Japan is convinced that it should play an important role for the conservation and management of the stock.

-Regarding the stock assessment of the Pacific bluefin tuna, the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) reported in July this year that the stock is being overexploited and its biomass is at a historic low level. Based on these findings, the ISC recommended reinforcement of the stock management.

- The 9th meeting of the Northern Committee of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), held in Japan in September this year, agreed to recommend at the WCPFC General Meeting in December 2013 to adopt the 2014 conservation and management proposal submitted by Japan. The proposal aims at reducing the catch of juvenile bluefin tunas by 15% from the 2002-2004 average.

-The Japanese government as well as the industry continues to make efforts to address this issue. Shirasu appreciated the understanding and support by ICFA members.

(2) Increasing fishing capacity of large-scale purse-seiners

The fishing capacity of large-scale purse-seiners in the world, especially in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean, is sharply increasing, despite the fact that the Japanese purse seine fishing industry has been maintaining its capacity consistently at the

same level for the last 18 years and also has been making efforts to reduce the by-catch of bigeye tuna, keeping the catch below the target level of the conservation and management measures of the WCPFC.

In 1997, the number of large-scale purse-seine fishing vessels in the region was limited to 205. But now it is reported that the number exceeds 300. (Japan restricted its number of vessels to only 35, while other countries increased their numbers.)

The catch amount of tunas by purse-seiners in the region rapidly increased as follows.

154,000 tons in 1981
 993,000 tons in 1991
 1,144,000 tons in 2001
 1,543,000 tons in 2011
 (Data by the WCPFC Year Book 2011)

Overfishing of bigeye tuna is now occurring in the region, prompting the WCPFC Scientific Committee to reduce the catch of this species. Purse-seine fishing operations using fish aggregating devices (FADs) are causing a direct impact on the stock. The WCPFC is making efforts to introduce management measures to tackle this problem.

(3) Elimination of IUU fishing

-It is needless to say that illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) activities undermine the sustainable utilization of fishery resources, and that elimination of IUU fishing is a professed desire of the international community.

-Japan has also been positively coping with this issue, especially in the field of tuna fisheries with the aim to ensure the sustainable use of tuna resources. This is because Japan is a principal producer of tunas as well as the largest consumer of sashimi tunas in the world.

-Japan's experience shows that the key to eliminate, prevent and deter IUU fishing is to shut out of the market the fish caught by IUU fishing activities.

-At present, regulations by the regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) have been taking effect to eliminate IUU fishing products from the market. These regulations include (1) the Positive List that authorizes only legitimate fishing vessels, registered with RFMOs, to engage in international tuna trade, and (2) the obligation to submit information on fisheries production to the relevant government (data on international trade, Catch Documentation Scheme, etc.). Enforcing these regulation schemes rigorously, Japan has been preventing the entry of IUU tunas into the domestic market.

-In this connection, Shirasu drew the attention of the ICFA members to a unique organization

established in Japan through cooperation of the Japanese government and the tuna fishing industry to tackle IUU fishing. It is the Organization for the Promotion of Responsible Tuna Fisheries (OPRT). Major tuna longline fishing associations in Japan and foreign countries as well as distributors and consumers in Japan joined OPRT to promote the elimination and prevention of IUU fishing activities. The Japan Fisheries Association is also a member of OPRT and supports its activities.

(4) Excessive enforcement of measures to protect sharks

Some countries seem to have prohibited recently any fishing vessel from retaining sharks onboard regardless of the species and fishing grounds. Reportedly, they seize the vessel if any shark is found onboard, even during innocent passage. But these measures could hamper legitimate fishing activities. Therefore, excessive and unreasonable protection of sharks should be stopped.

4. Moves to restrict bottom trawling

ICFA decided to oppose any excessive measures to restrict bottom trawling in the years ahead, taking into account the FAO's work vis-à-vis the new fisheries legislation to prohibit bottom trawling (then discussed at the European Union parliament) as well as the concern that such a ban might expand to other areas of the ocean.

After the ICFA annual meeting, the EU voted and adopted this draft legislation on November 4. But additional amendments seem to be still on the table. JFA will continue to follow the issue and report on it as appropriate.

MEL Japan News



MEL Japan product users aim to become smart consumers

Hiroko Shirakawa
 Aomori Prefecture Consumers' Association

I would like to express my appreciation for the fruitful exchange of views we had at a meeting on February 22 for promoting the Marine Eco-label Japan (MEL Japan) scheme.

We, as a non-profit organization, have been engaged in activities in all areas we could in the midst of drastic changes in society. Our aim is to build a safe society--one in which all the people can lead a secure life. Over the past several years, we have focused our attention on the theme of food from various perspectives through the eyes of consumers. Our keywords have been "to support food life by knowing, choosing and buying food."

Under these circumstances, this meeting on the promotion of the Marine Eco-label Japan (MEL Japan) scheme, based on previous study meetings, presented a truly timely opportunity for us to get closer to our goal.

Most of the related organizations that attended the MEL Japan Council meeting came from western Japan, an area having a number of certified fisheries. Notably, I was much impressed by the high-level awareness in Kochi Prefecture which has committed considerable energy to the promotion of the scheme, including budgetary arrangements. I was no less impressed by the enthusiastic concept and approach of fisheries cooperatives in each prefecture.

In the case of Aomori Prefecture, most consumers have little or no knowledge on what MEL Japan is. Here we have a clear lack of information. In the area of agriculture, our association has conducted fairly wide-ranging activities, including study sessions, visits to farms and the exchange of views with producers, and have accumulated a considerable amount of knowledge among participants. In the case of fisheries, however, the reality is that there has been almost no circulation of information. In

Aomori Prefecture, which is surrounded by the sea on its three sides and has benefited from an abundance of fish, we consumers seemed to have eaten seafood as a matter of daily routine without giving any special thought to the state of the resources. We tended to think that the conservation of the marine environment only meant annual programs such as collecting garbage and debris on the beach and in the sea to clean the marine surroundings.

In the eco-friendly fisheries tour program which we organized last October, we began to have participants visit fishing villages, and learn from, and exchange views with, fishermen. On that occasion, the Japan Fisheries Association has been instrumental in explaining the MEL Japan scheme to us in an easy-to-understand way. Thanks to this assistance, the consumers who took part in the program became interested in the information that they heard for the first time from the perspective of resource management. This was clearly shown in essays later submitted by participants.

We learned from, and exchanged views with, fisheries cooperative members, prefecture officials, district managers and sales staff, about the background leading to MEL Japan certification for corbicula clam gathering by the Jusan Lake Fisheries Cooperative and for spiny dog fish by the Mikuriya Fisheries Cooperative. Through these activities, we came to obtain knowledge on how MEL Japan-certified seafood is friendly to the environment and can become local brand products. Then, we had the opportunity to actually eat soup using MEL Japan-certified corbicula clams and made a tour of the fishing ports to promote exchange with local fishermen and

deepen our knowledge on the MEL Japan scheme. After the tour, MEL Japan products were presented and we had the opportunity to hold cooking sessions to have consumers get in direct touch with our local cuisine. Furthermore, we have developed some recipes using MEL Japan products in a way to have children eat them readily, and conducted cooking sessions again. I am happy to report to you that easy-to-cook delicious recipes that can be prepared at home were accepted favorably by people of different generations--from children to the elderly.

Our attendance at the recent MEL Japan meeting certainly provided us, Aomori people, with a chance to consider anew our approach to fisheries as consumers in this prefecture.



MEL Japan seminar at the Jusan Fisheries Cooperative