

Japan
Fisheries
Association



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Views and Opinions of Japan's Fisheries Industry

Seafood health benefit

FAO, WHO stress health benefits of seafood consumption

"Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation on the Risks and Benefits of Fish Consumption" was publicly released in May 2010. It provides guidance to governments about how to better communicate the benefits of eating seafood for heart health in adults and for brain development in babies. Importantly, and for the first time, the FAO/WHO experts also explain the risks of avoiding seafood. The report is the result of a January 2010 meeting of seventeen leading international seafood scientists at FAO Headquarters in Rome, Italy.

Isaribi recognizes that this important outcome must be widely shared for the benefit of human health, and publishes the executive summary of the Consultation. Given below is the full text of the executive summary.

Background

The 38th meeting of the Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants (CCFAC) requested the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), at its 29th session in 2006, to seek scientific advice from FAO and WHO on the health benefits of fish consumption comparing those to the health risks associated with the contaminants methylmercury (MeHg) and dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs (DLCs) that may be present in fish. The health risks associated with dietary intake of these compounds have previously been assessed by the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA).

The CAC request was driven by growing public concern regarding the presence of chemical contaminants in fish. This concern has become more apparent in recent years, while during the same period the multiple nutritional benefits of including fish in the diet have become increasingly clear.

The evolving science in this field has led to questions about how much fish should be eaten, and by whom, in order to minimize the risks of chemical exposures and maximize the health benefits. National authorities have been faced with the challenge of communicating complicated and nuanced messages to consumers and also with questions on regulating maximum levels of these chemical contaminants in fish and other foods.

FAO and WHO held an Expert Consultation on the Risks and Benefits of Fish Consumption 25 to 29 January 2010 at FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy. Seventeen experts in nutrition, toxicology, epidemiology, dietary exposure and risk-benefit assessments discussed the risks and the benefits of fish consumption. Their task was to review data

on nutrient and specific chemical (MeHg and DLCs) contaminant levels in a range of fish species, as well as recent scientific literature covering the risks and benefits of fish consumption. The review was used to consider risk-benefit assessments for specific end-points of benefits and risks, including for sensitive groups of the population. The output is intended to provide guidance to national food safety authorities and the Codex Alimentarius Commission in their work on managing risks taking into account the existing data on the benefits of eating fish.

Scope

- The purpose of the Expert Consultation was to provide a framework for assessing the net health benefits or risks of fish consumption that would assist governments to prepare advice for their own populations.
- Fish was defined as finfish and shellfish, whether of marine or freshwater origin, farmed or wild. Marine mammals and algae, as well as sustainability issues and environmental impacts, although important, were considered to be outside the scope of the Consultation.
- Based on the strength of the evidence, the Consultation examined the benefits of fish consumption on neurodevelopment and prevention of cardiovascular disease. Multiple other possible benefits were reviewed in background papers but not focused upon by the Consultation in their consideration of relative risks and benefits. The Consultation also examined the risks from fish consumption of MeHg and DLCs, including dioxins, furans and dioxin-like PCBs.
- The group was also requested to conduct an analysis of these benefits and associated risks and make a series of recommendations for target populations: including fetuses, infants/young children, women of reproductive

age and high fish consumers as well as the general population.

Conclusions

- Consumption of fish provides energy, protein, and a range of other important nutrients, including the long-chain n-3 poly unsaturated fatty acids (LC n-3 PUFA).
- Eating fish is part of the cultural traditions of many peoples and in some populations is a major source of food and essential nutrients.
- Among the general adult population, consumption of fish, particularly oily fish, lowers the risk of coronary heart disease (CHD) mortality. There is absence of probable or convincing evidence of CHD risks of MeHg. Potential cancer risks of DLCs are well below established CHD benefits.
- When considering benefits of LC n-3 PUFA vs. risks of MeHg among women of childbearing age: maternal fish consumption lowers the risk of suboptimal neurodevelopment in their offspring compared to women not eating fish in most circumstances evaluated.
- At levels of maternal DLC intake (from fish and other dietary sources) that do not exceed the provisional tolerable monthly intake (PTMI) of 70 picograms/kg bodyweight/month established by JECFA, neurodevelopmental risk is negligible. At levels of maternal DLC intake (from fish and other dietary sources) that exceed the PTMI, neurodevelopmental risk may no longer be negligible.
- Among infants, young children, and adolescents, the available data are currently insufficient to derive a quantitative framework of health risks and benefits of eating fish. However, healthy dietary patterns that include fish and are established early in life influence dietary habits and health during adult life.

Recommendations

To minimize risks in target populations, the Consultation recommended a series of steps that member states should take to better assess and manage the risks and benefits of fish consumption and more effectively communicate with their citizens:

- Acknowledge fish consumption as an important food source of energy, protein, and a range of essential nutrients and part of the cultural traditions of many peoples.
- Emphasize the benefits of fish consumption on reducing CHD mortality (and CHD mortality risks of not eating fish) for the general adult population.
- Emphasize the neurodevelopment benefits to offspring of fish consumption by women of childbearing age, particularly pregnant women and nursing mothers, and the neurodevelopment risks to offspring of such women not consuming fish
- Develop, maintain, and improve existing databases on specific nutrients and contaminants, particularly MeHg and DLCs, in fish consumed in their region.
- Develop and evaluate risk management and communication strategies that both minimize risks and maximize benefits from eating fish.



MEL Japan News

3 more fisheries are to be assessed for MEL Japan certification

Offshore Pole and Line Skipjack Fishery

The National Offshore Tuna Fisheries Association of Japan with 67 boats engaging in coastal pole and line skipjack fisheries has put in an application for MEL Japan certification.

The target of the certification is a group of offshore pole and line skipjack fishing boats. Fishing grounds covered by these fisheries are the waters of Nansei Islands, Ogasawara Islands, western Kyushu, coastal Kishu/Boso, as well as eastern coastal Sanriku.

The coastal pole and line skipjack fisheries practice a fishing method that involves capturing a single fish with a rod and artificial baits, after chumming schools of skipjack with live baits and water sprinkling. The fishing style is therefore believed to harness natural resources in a sustainable and efficient manner.

Pelagic Pole and Line Skipjack Fishery

The Japan Tuna Fisheries Cooperative Association has also applied for MEL Japan certification.

The fishery to be examined for the certification is the Pelagic Pole and Line Skipjack Fishery and conducts the same fishing procedure as their above-mentioned coastal counterparts, considered therefore suitable for the certification.

In an attempt for wider recognition by society as sustainable and environmentally-friendly fisheries, both offshore and pelagic pole and line skipjack fisheries have set their minds on MEL Japan certification one after the other.

Minamikayabe set-net fishery

Set-net fishery association in Minamikayabe, Hakodate, southern part of Hokkaido has also applied for MEL Japan certification. The target of the certification is Large sized set-net fishery. Details are to be published in the course of assessment.

Masashi Nishimura at MEL Japan Secretariat said, "A wide array of fisheries are currently considered for the certification, evidencing a widening circle of certified fisheries. We intend to further energize our activities with an aim to get it identified as a certification system for Japan's fishermen."

(The original article was published in Suisan Times on September 13, 2010, and was updated by Isaribi.)

Seafood Expo

Foreign firms actively joined in the 12th Japan Seafood Show

The 12th Japan International Seafood & Technology Expo, organized by the Japan Fisheries Association (JFA), was held at the Tokyo Big Sight on July 21-23. The show attracted 27,814 visitors during the three-day period.

The Expo highlighted the perspective of sustainable use of fishery resources and the environment under the theme of "Fish diet expanding in the world--the importance of conserving valuable fishery resources for the contemporary consumers and future generations." The number of exhibitors totaled 430 firms with 500 booths, largely surpassing last year's 367 firms with 495 booths, although it fell short of the scale in 2008 when the record number of exhibitors participated.



Besides Japanese companies, there was participation from 12 countries and one territory: the United States, India, Australia, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, China, Norway, Bahrain, Papua New Guinea, Vietnam, Malaysia and Mexico, with Taiwan participating as a territory. The number of booths by foreign participants was about 120, which accounted for slightly over 20% of the total booths. Furthermore, more than 10 countries took part through Japanese trading companies and agencies.

Notably, Rongcheng City of Shandong Province, a Chinese city with a thriving fishery processing industry, mobilized a number of local enterprises at the Expo, which resulted in the largest scale participation from China in this show during the past years. A staffer at the booth noted that seafood processing firms in Rongcheng hope to receive orders for processing from Japanese companies. He assured that every processor in the city is capable of responding to orders for processing sophisticated products from Japan and they have a fully-controlled hygienic system. One of the exhibitors from the city also exhibited accessories, such as necklaces, made from freshwater pearl.

Mexico, which marked its first participation in the Expo, displayed a large-size fish in the family of sea basses, which looks very much like kelp bass, a high-grade fish in Japan. This fish, first introduced in

Japan, was fried with butter, and presented to visitors for sampling. Those who tried eating it said its taste and oral sensation were just like those of kelp bass. A staffer at the Mexican booth said they will propose various ways of eating different from those of kelp bass so that the fish is widely accepted by Japanese consumers.

At the Thai booth, cobia, for which the government is now promoting experimental culture in Phuket, was displayed. An official at the booth explained that they presented this fish at the Expo in the hope to feel out the reaction by Japanese consumers. He also said that experiment in Thailand is advancing smoothly.

Korean displays included many types of nori laver, a seafood commodity that enjoys a high popularity in Japan. Also, sampling of Matkori liquor was offered, and samples of naturally-produced salt were distributed to the visitors.

Norway publicized its seafood, with an emphasis on salmon and mackerel. While Japanese consumers are fully familiarized with both commodities from Norway, Norwegian fishing firms wish to further expand demand in Japan by proposing new menus. One of the new menus was "Beauty Chirashi-zushi," which has high esthetic effects with the addition of avocado, sesame and perilla. Many visitors, including men, flocked at the Norwegian booth at the time of sampling of this menu.

From Canada, Blue Link introduced Canadian-produced fresh sablefish at its own booth. Blue Link said it intends to market in Japan the sablefish for which another Canadian company succeeded in full-cycle farming for the first time in the world. Although demand for sliced sablefish meat enjoys a strong popularity in Japan, only frozen products are being now supplied in the market because this species is not caught in the coastal area of Japan. Blue Link plans to market this fish under the brand name of "Kirari" in the hope to have Japanese consumers to come to know the true deliciousness of live sablefish.

For other events, Sushi Expo and International Fishery and Aquaculture Technology Expo were held concurrently, as in last year. A total of about 40 sessions of seminars on seafood and fishery technology were held during the three-day Expo.

Control of purse-seine capacity

Japan, China agree to reinforce cooperation in restricting large-scale tuna purse-seine capacity

On Aug. 27, 2010, Mr. Masahiko Yamada, Japan's Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (then) and his Chinese counterpart, Mr. Han Changfu met in Beijing and confirmed their intention to strengthen the cooperation in the tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs). In particular, the following points were recognized as specific future actions.

- Both sides intend to cooperate to restrict the uncontrolled increase of large tuna purse seine fishing vessels in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO).

- China intends to prevent its large tuna purse seine fishing vessels from increasing over the current level (owned by Chinese fishing companies) in WCPO.
 - Japan intends to work with China to increase the Chinese bigeye tuna quotas through quota transfer or other available actions in RFMOs so as to alleviate the difficulties of shortage the Chinese fishing industry is facing.

In the meantime, commenting on Japan's effort to restrain its tuna purse-seine fishing effort, Mr. Akira Nakamae, president of the Japan Purse-seiners' Fisheries Association, stressed that Japan controlled the number of tuna purse-seine fishing vessels in a way not to increase pressures on the resources. He said that Japan should appeal the international community about such efforts, in other words, that Japan has taken quite a different approach from the countries which have indiscriminately increased their fishing capacity. Japan has seriously abided by the resolution of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) from the preparatory stages of the establishment of that organization.

Taiji dolphin issue

Woe of the society misled by fact-distorting environmental business

In May this year, the National Institute of Minamata Disease announced that the mercury contents in the hair of the residents of Taiji, a town located along the western Japan Pacific coast, have no adverse effects on their health, although mercury density was found higher than the nation's average. This is based on the survey conducted by the Center to examine the hair of about 1,000 residents of Taiji at the request of the Taiji Municipal Office.

The survey was carried out by the initiative of Kazutaka Sangen, mayor of Taiji, a community in Japan that has a history of whaling and whale diet custom spanning over 400 years. Sangen said: "People in Taiji have eaten cetacean products for the past four centuries. Far from suffering from toxic diseases, it was shown that those who have eaten more whale meat generally have a longer life span and maintain good health. We need to clarify this fact scientifically." About 32% of the townspeople cooperated in two surveys—one in summer and another in winter.

The survey results revealed a tendency of high mercury density in the hair of the Taiji people, which was apparently induced by the habit of consuming whale products. But no toxic symptoms were detected. Mayor Sangen said that "the survey findings confirmed the good health situation of the people, as we had anticipated before."

In spite of all that, environmental NGOs and mass media mostly in the western advanced countries that oppose whaling and whale diet seem to have taken this outcome of the survey as a suitable material for promoting their anti-whaling campaign. They focused on higher mercury density in the hair of Taiji people alone, and stepped up the anti-whaling propaganda,

repeatedly emphasizing only this aspect.

The Taiji Municipal Office briefed on the results of the survey to general newspapers in Japan so that the survey figure might not be interpreted in an unbalanced and unilateral manner. As a result of this effort, fair and unbiased reporting was generally made in Japan at the time of official announcement of the survey outcome. At the same time, however, there were cases in which only high mercury density was highlighted, before the "non-presence of toxic symptoms," which is the core of the survey, was validated scientifically.

On the other hand, the issue of minor accumulation of mercury and dioxin in large fish has long provided a major ground for the anti-whaling and anti-fisheries campaigns by Greenpeace and World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and, above all, by the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, a radical anti-whaling group that has engaged in harassment of the activities by Japan's research whaling vessels in the Antarctic. These kinds of campaigns have had large impact in that they are widely and easily accepted by the public in certain countries outside Japan. It has thus been shown that these protest activities have become a prominent fund-raising business.

A typical example is the production of the Hollywood-made film, "The Cove," in which a former American dolphin trainer had a starring role. In point of fact, Sea Shepherd virtually cooperated financially to the production of this film through their fund-raising activities. There are a number of Hollywood people who support Sea Shepherd. The *Ady Gil*, a Sea Shepherd speed boat which was smashed after engaging in harassment against Japanese research vessels, was named after a Hollywood multimillionaire who donated a large sum of money to that organization. The captain of *Ady Gil* was later found guilty of injury and other misconducts at the Japanese court.

Sources related to Taiji Fisheries Cooperative blamed the Cove crew for portraying whaling as "the evil" and for appealing that consumption of whales and dolphins would lead to mercury toxicity, utilizing various doubtful means. The purpose of the Cove was to frame Taiji residents as the culprit under the guise of a documentary film. The Cove staff sneaked photography, filmed angry faces of the townspeople whom they intentionally provoked, and patched up the scenes taken in the past in a bid to depict cruelty of dolphin hunting. They also quoted a Japanese scientist's remark on mercury content, who was photographed in a place having nothing to do with Taiji, and misplaced data deliberately. The result of these activities was the Academy Award.

The Cove was put on the screen in some areas in Japan under the pretext of "freedom of expression" in spite of the opposition from Taiji people. The showing of the film left us with an unpleasant aftertaste as only the business of the theaters and Sea Shepherd was pursued.

Not only fishermen but also the general public should have their critical viewpoint to this kind of environmental business as it is anticipated that such a business will further escalate in the future.

(This article is based on the Japanese fisheries daily, the *SUIKEI*, dated Sept. 16, 2010)