

Japan Fisheries Association



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Views and Opinions of Japan's Fisheries Industry

Eastern Japan Mega-quake and Tsunami

JFA is grateful for relief donations from all over the world **-JFA President visits disaster-hit communities to assure help for restoration-**

The Japan Fisheries Association (JFA) expresses its heartfelt gratitude for the relief contributions it received from many people and organizations all over the world in support of the communities affected by the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake that devastated broad areas along the Pacific coast on March 11, 2011. JFA President Toshiro Shirasu, also Chief of the Eastern Japan Earthquake Disaster Relief Headquarters, visited from April 18 to 20 Kesennuma, Ofunato, Shiogama, Ishinomaki and Onagawa—the cities and towns in the Sanriku region ravaged severely by the mega earthquake and tsunami. Shirasu delivered directly to mayors or their deputies at the municipal offices the donations and relief goods contributed broadly from the fisheries communities overseas and throughout Japan.



At the same time, he conveyed to them words of encouragement, assuring that the JFA will maintain a strong bond with people in the disaster-stricken areas under the slogan: "We will never give up fisheries in Japan!" He pledged that the JFA is committed to do its utmost to restore the disaster places, principally based on fisheries.

People in plagued areas believe that there will be no restoration of the region without the resuscitation of fisheries. Reconstruction of fisheries will lead to rebuilding of Japan as a whole. To lose the fishing ground in Sanriku region having a vast treasure of fishery resources would be a great loss for Japan as a nation.

The city and town leaders, who received the relief contributions and goods in such a short interval after the earthquake occurred, expressed immense gratitude, confirming their resolve to restore, as soon as possible, the fisheries which is the core industry of the region. As long as the sea is there, fisheries will never cease, they said.

The JFA continues its efforts to help bereaved families and affected people. It plans to give support to them mainly through the local self-governing bodies in the stricken areas with the contributions it has received. The relief donations received as of July 1, 2011, including those from eight organizations and two private persons overseas, amounted to ¥136,963,191.

In what follows, JFA reports, with immense gratitude, on the visits of Shirasu and his team to disaster-stricken communities.

Kesennuma:

**--Heading toward resuming the fish market
and securing fishing boat activities--**

Upon landing at the Sendai Airport and getting off the plane, Shirasu and other members of the mission were taken by surprise. Although they knew through television reports that Natori City, situated at a sea-level zone, was hit by the earthquake and tsunami, they found the scenery

from both sides of the train windows were enough to convince them of the terror of tsunami. Buildings were destroyed from their foundation, houses left only with their cornerstones laid bare, cruel sight of big trees which fell to the ground -- all these atrocious sights could not have been seen in man-made setting for an earthquake horror film. When the mission hired cars, the rent-a-car operator said that he would not take responsibility for flat tire because of rough roads, and now they came to know what the operator meant.

When the team entered Kesennuma, the first leg of their visits, they witnessed a far more disastrous reality. Probably those who are related to fisheries might have visited the city in the past and still have the memory of the city. But the coastal area, where fishing bases were concentrated, had been devastated so severely by catastrophic blows of the earthquake and tsunami that it was not possible to identify the landscape and locations of former buildings. The disaster was terrible but it was somewhat mitigated by the continued presence of the municipal office building standing on a hill. President Shirasu expressed to Mayor Shigeru Sugawara his sympathy for the destruction of the city by the unprecedented earthquake and damage on many citizens who were affected by the calamity. He offered special condolences for many lives lost in the disaster.



Shirasu delivering relief contribution to Mayor Sugawara

Shirasu said that "many people in the fisheries circle in Japan donated for the restoration of Kesennuma, a city known as an outstanding fishing community." "To the present time, he added, Kesennuma has provided us with valuable fishery products from the Sanriku region on a stable basis. The port has functioned as a landing base for coastal fishing for saury, skipjack and other important species from the near-shore grounds. It also served as a major base for distant-water fishing, such as tuna longline fishing. Furthermore, it has played its roles as a distribution and processing base of seafood. Given these vital roles, we can say that there will be no restoration of fisheries in Japan without the restoration of Kesennuma."

Shirasu renewed his pledge that the JFA will exert its best efforts in helping Kesennuma to achieve recovery, with fisheries as its core.

In response, Sugawara made his commitment clear to preserve the tradition of the fishing community. He said: "70% of Kesennuma's population (about 70,000) are related to fisheries in some way or other. The coastal zone of the city was exposed to the damage of the quake, and part of the fish market sank into the ocean as a result of land subsidence. This means that a direct damage was inflicted on the heart of the city itself. We are now faced with the need, first and foremost, to ensure the livelihood of the people. For this goal, we will rehabilitate the fish market at an early date, secure cruise routes for fishing vessels and

restore the fisheries industry. As long as the sea is there, Kesennuma will survive."

(NOTE: Kesennuma has been the top landing port of fresh skipjack in Japan for 14 years in a row. It is also well-known for the production of shark products, including shark fin. The city's committee to reconstruct the fishing port functions declared on March 28 that, as the responsibility of survivors of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, the citizens will be united to move forward to restoration and reconstruction of Kesennuma as a fishing port city." Mayor Sugawara said that "after the occurrence of the great disaster, people in Kesennuma came to be aware afresh that fisheries are the starting point of our city's restoration.")

Ofunato:

--Will strive to secure employment and ensure the use of fishing vessels--

As the next destination, the mission visited Ofunato City in Iwate Prefecture on the same day, by traveling from Kesennuma along the coast line through the Karakuwa district in Miyagi Prefecture.

On both sides of the roads, made by removing the heap of rubble, there were houses which were shattered in an instant with all the memories attached to them. The building of Kesennuma Junior High School, ruined by the tsunami, was seen from there in an unspeakably miserable state.

The fishing port of Ofunato was also destroyed, but the municipal office building remained safe as it was located at a high point.

While delivering the relief donation in a meeting with Deputy Mayor Teruo Kimuro, President Shirasu said: "Ofunato City, a member of the JFA, has continued stable supply of fresh seafood to consumers in Japan. Ofunato is specially known as a producer of abalone. The 'Yoshihama abalone' harvested as a local brand by Yoshihama Fisheries Cooperative is valued in China as the top-class commodity. It is very painful to see that Ofunato suffered tremendous damage of the earthquake and tsunami. Please be assured that the JFA will go all out to help restore fisheries, Ofunato's basic industry, and ensure the effective use of the bountiful fishery resources in the Sanriku fishing ground."

Mr. Kimuro conveyed to the mission the strong will of the city to restore fisheries, by showing the photos of the damage and fishery facilities that were left out. He stated: "Most importantly, we will strive to ensure the use of fishing vessels, and help the disaster victims and fishermen to find employment and revitalize and resume market and business activities. We do hope that the national government will show us the broad blueprint toward reconstruction as soon as possible. We would like to seek the JFA's help toward this goal."

(NOTE: Ofunato experienced the damage of three great earthquakes so far, including the Meiji Sanriku Earthquake in 1896 and Showa Sanriku Earthquake in 1933. During the latest disaster, the Ofunato market remained safe by and large and fishermen are beginning to resume their work, but abalone fishery, its representative fishing sector, was destroyed almost entirely. It is said that at least 10 years will be needed for recovery of this important sector.)

Shiogama:

--Seafood freezing facilities evaded damage, providing a clue to restoration--

Following Kesennuma and Ofunato on April 18, President Shirasu and his team visited Shiogama, Ishinomaki and Onagawa in Miyagi Prefecture on April 19 to deliver the relief donations.

Handing out the donation personally to Shiogama Mayor Akira Sato, Shirasu stressed that "there will be no recovery of fisheries in Miyagi unless the city of Shiogama recovers itself." He further stated: "Among affected cities, Shiogama showed a sign of recovery at an early stage, as seen in the case of landings of tuna at its port soon after the disaster. This truly proved the high spirit of fishermen in Shiogama, one of the top landing ports of tunas in Japan. I would like to encourage all of you to keep up with your efforts, not forgetting that many fellow fishermen elsewhere are ready to help you."

Sato thanked Shirasu heartfully for his words of encouragement. He said: "On April 14, about one month after the earthquake struck our city, Hoyo Maru No. 18, a tuna longliner from Oita, western Japan, entered our port as the first fishing vessel after the port activities resumed. It landed fresh tunas, including albacore, yellowfin and bigeye, which it caught in the Pacific. On April 18, the second vessel from Tokushima arrived at the port, to be followed by another at the end of April."

We would like to take this development positively so that the light of fisheries in Miyagi can continue to be kindled. The advantage we had was that about one third of the fish market facilities were left without being destroyed. Thanks to subsequent hard work for rehabilitation, we managed to carry out auctions at the market. We would like to have not only fishermen but also seafood processors use the market facilities because the cold-store warehouses were retained in a usable state. We are committed to make further progress toward the restoration, by using these advantages as a breakthrough."

Before closing the meeting, Shirasu strenuously pledged the JFA's assistance for the restoration of fisheries in Shiogama.

(NOTE: Shiogama is an important landing base for fresh tunas in Japan. Many near-shore tuna longline fishing vessels are based in this port. Only four of those vessels were damaged, while the remaining

350 were safe. The destruction of Shiogama Port was partial and the fish market and processing plants almost recovered. The fishery processing complex where many seafood processors participate stays in good conditions.)

Ishinomaki:

--Aims to rebuild the city by harmonizing fishery production, distribution and processing sectors--

When the team moved from Shiogama to Ishinomaki, the roads were jammed up. We encountered a long queue of vehicles of the Self-Defense Force, which came to the region for rescue and assistance. There were also trucks and cars that brought relief and emergency goods from all over Japan.

In Ishinomaki, an ad-hoc municipal office and disaster headquarters have been temporarily established on the upper floors of Sakurano Department Store, located just in front of the Ishinomaki station, whose lower floors were harshly ravaged by the earthquake and tsunami.

Before meeting Mayor Hiroshi Kameyama, President Shirasu talked with private-sector representatives, including Kunio Suno, President of Ishinomaki Fish Market. Suno requested Shirasu to provide more information such as the government program to restore quake-plagued areas and to assist the livelihood of the people. He stated: "Those who survived the disaster are now standing up firmly for the reconstruction of the city. I hope the assistance to the city should be focused on this perspective."

He further said that "for the reconstruction of fisheries, it is crucial, first of all, to secure means of livelihood of the people. But in a fisheries base like Ishinomaki, fisheries, distribution (market) and processing sectors have developed in a very close linkage, therefore, we do hope that reconstruction plan will incorporate these three sectors as much as possible. Especially, Ishinomaki has the most active



Kesennuma Fishing Port immediately after the tsunami attack

and thriving fishery processing sector in Miyagi Prefecture. Most of the processing plants in the city underwent catastrophic destruction, with many workers losing their job. For this reason, Ishinomaki municipal office has established a general department that would bring together the production, distribution and processing sectors, with a goal to promote overall reconstruction of the city. We do hope that the national government as well as the JFA support the goal and activities of this department."

Shirasu noted the fact that Ishinomaki is a city of fisheries and is a central base in the Sanriku region that has one of the largest fishing grounds in the world. The Japanese people will certainly sustain a tremendous loss if local brand fish such as Kinka mackerel caught in the rich fishing ground off Kinkazan are not supplied to consuming places throughout the country. If Ishinomaki fails to achieve a full-scale recovery, it would be a loss of a national scale. Based on this recognition, the JFA will continue its support of Ishinomaki."

In a meeting that followed, Mayor Kameyama told Shirasu that the city is much grateful for the JFA's speedy action to bring the relief donation by the hand of its president in person. He further stated: "Ishinomaki, a fisheries city, lost no time in starting its efforts toward reconstruction. We have a strong sense of solidarity among us. We look forward to the national government to show us an overall reconstruction plan while the people have such strong enthusiasm. People in the disaster-stricken areas are doing what they can, despite profound sorrow. I wish all the Japanese people become aware of their plight and efforts."

(NOTE: Ishinomaki has the second largest fishing port in the Tohoku region after Hachinohe in Aomori Prefecture. The volume of fishery products handled at the Ishinomaki Port in a year amounts to 115,000 tons. However, the Fish Market--the center of the city,--seafood processing complex, diverse types of aquaculture facilities, set-net fishing equipment and other facilities were subjected to catastrophic destruction by a giant tsunami with the height exceeding 20 meters. Jobs for more than 4,000 people were lost. The damage on fishing vessels was serious, except for offshore trawlers and large-scale purse-seiners. Land subsidence after the earthquake also produced a serious problem.)

Onagawa:

--Plans to create a new town where people can live comfortably--

Driving from Ishinomaki through Watanoha and going round the Oshika Peninsula, we headed for Onagawa via the National Highway Route 2 passing through Ayukawa area. At the end of a winding mountain trail emerged a number of fishing villages all of a sudden before our eyes. All of the villages had been severely hit by the earthquake and tsunami. We could not believe that it was what

used to be the beautiful rias coast. What we saw there were utterly miserable and helpless scenes -- fishing boats stranded on top of the fishing port together with debris, scattered fishing gear, collapsed wharves and breakwaters. Entering the Onagawa town, the impact became even stronger. About 70% of buildings and houses were crumpled, and trains were twisted and turned over ruthlessly. The municipal office building was also destroyed, so the disaster relief headquarters were temporarily set up in a nearby Onagawa No.2 Elementary School.

Mayor Nobutaka Azumi said, after thanking President Shirasu for the relief donation: "As you see, Onagawa experienced a catastrophic blow by the earthquake and tsunami. Furthermore, the town still gets flooded at full tide because the land subsided after the disaster. After undergoing such an intense disaster, I do not think it is possible to restore the town back exactly to what it was before. Further, when we consider that earthquake, tsunami and land subsidence that might occur in the future, we may have to take an approach under a concept to build a completely new town, not just to restore the former town. We need a reconstruction plan for a town where we can live safely and securely.

Responding to the mayor, Shirasu noted that he believes it is crucial to have a medium- and long-term plan to restore the town as well as a plan to resuscitate fisheries firmly. He further stated: "Onagawa has been the top saury landing port in Japan, and has had a thriving fishery processing industry for many years. Therefore, I think we need a reconstruction plan that envisages building of a town having a safe residential concept and the one having fisheries at the core.

Azumi said some people may leave Onagawa for good and some private corporations might give up joining in reconstruction. But we need a message and support that encourages people who have chosen to stay and pursue reconstruction. To begin with, we would like to launch on restoration of the city, starting with a small step, say, by setting up an open-air market.

Commenting on the mayor's remark, Shirasu stressed: "It might take a long time for Onagawa to restore itself, but you have the sea with bountiful resources in front of your shore. I believe fish and marine plants will return eventually. Let us place our hope in this outlook. We have no reason to leave those valuable resources unused. Please be assured that the JFA will continue its support to Onagawa."

(NOTE: Onagawa was exposed to serious damage of tsunami, with seafood cold-stores and processing facilities, the town's principal industry, totally collapsed. The annual trading volume at Onagawa Fish Market totals about ¥8.5 billion, of which saury and coho salmon account for 60%. At the town's meeting on fisheries restoration on April 2, Mayor Azumi appealed Onagawa to stand up against adversity and said that the shortest way to reconstruction is the restoration of fisheries.)

(The above articles are based on the reports of the Nikkan Suisan Keizai Shimbun.)