

Japan Fisheries Association



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Sankaido Bldg.,
9-13 Akasaka 1, Minato-ku,
Tokyo, Japan 107-0052
tel: 81-3-3585-6683
<http://www.suisankai.or.jp>

Views and Opinions of Japan's Fisheries Industry

ICFA Meeting

ICFA pledges support for restoration of disaster-hit Japanese fisheries; urges governments to continue efforts to manage fishing in sensitive areas

The International Coalition of Fisheries Associations (ICFA) met on 5-7 October 2011 in Rome, Italy, to identify issues of common interest and develop advocacy strategies to address these opportunities. ICFA members also met informally with U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) representatives. Toshiro Shirasu, president of the Japan Fisheries Association, led the Japanese delegation.

Shirasu expressed his heartfelt gratitude for the kind assistance from many foreign countries in connection with the disaster caused by the great earthquake and tsunami that devastated eastern and northern Japan in March of this year.

Although it will take a long time to restore and rehabilitate the ravaged areas, he said, the Japanese government is committed, as a top-priority policy goal, to help the fisheries industry in this region rebuild as soon as possible because this region has an enormous importance for Japanese fisheries, having one of the most bountiful fishing grounds in the world and accounting for nearly 20% of the overall seafood supply in Japan.

During the meeting, each Member made presentation on the issues facing its fisheries to seek other participants' understanding. What follows are topics Japan presented as having a high priority.

1. Issues facing fisheries in Japan and measures taken for them

Fisheries in Japan are now faced with the following three major issues.

First, seafood consumption in Japan has been on a decline. In terms of per-capita consumption, meat has exceeded fish. However, when compared with other advanced countries, the Japanese are still the largest consumers of seafood.

Because of the persistent deflationary economy in Japan, consumption of seafood remains stagnant, with sales going on at a slow. The Japanese people, especially younger generations, tend to eat less fish now, compared with previous years.

The development of the fisheries industry in Japan will be severely affected if this sluggish seafood



ICFA meeting

consumption continues.

The JFA is trying to check this trend by staging campaigns and other means to popularize fish diet and expand seafood consumption in Japan. But, to date, we have not come to decisively effective measures.

Secondly, we face the need to construct new fishing vessels as the vessels currently being used have aged and become outdated, resulting in decreased productivity in fishing operations. However, fishing companies are unable to procure financing to replace their vessels as business conditions are deteriorating. Furthermore, there are no government subsidy programs for replacing vessels.

Thirdly, Japan's seafood exports have been stalled, partly due to the accident of a nuclear power plant in Fukushima, caused by the great earthquake and tsunami in March this year. Even exports of the seafood, for which safety has been confirmed, have decreased drastically due to rootless negative rumors.

Countermeasures:

As countermeasures for the above issues, Japan is considering the following activities.

(1) Regarding the expansion of fish consumption, the JFA has established within its office a new section, "Center for Promotion of Fish Diet," with a view to discuss more effective ways to expand seafood consumption.

(2) The JFA is committed to promoting sustainable fisheries taking into consideration the marine ecosystem and the environment by promoting the Marine Eco-Label Japan (MEL Japan) scheme.

(3) With respect to updating fishing vessels, the JFA is requesting the government that policy-based assistance be extended for the introduction of energy-saving-type fishing vessels and environment-friendly fishing methods.

(4) Regarding seafood exports, the JFA is striving, both on a governmental and private levels, to explain to importing countries and importers about the safety of Japan's seafood with the aim to gain better understanding.

(5) Especially on the issue of HACCP, the JFA is making efforts to achieve even more exhaustive sanitation controls of seafood because Japan is lagging behind in the acquisition of HACCP required for exports to the European Union.

2. Japan's experience of the Great East Japan Earthquake/Tsunami

Japan outlined the damage inflicted on fisheries by the devastating disaster, and presented the measures that the government and the industry have been taking to cope with this situation. Regarding shrinking seafood consumption and declining exports, caused by the disaster, the JFA explained the measures now being taken as stated above, and sought advice from fisheries organizations in the world based on the recognition that such a state could occur in any other place in the world.

In response to Japan's presentation, ICFA agreed on adopting a resolution, stating that it will continue assistance for the restoration of the disaster-hit fisheries industry in Japan and contribute to the solution of export decline due to negative rumors by appealing the safety of Japanese seafood. The text of the resolution will be presented in the future issue of ISARIBI after it is finalized.

In the exchange of views with FAO officials, Japan explained the difficulty it is experiencing in connection with the impact of rootless negative rumors on Japanese seafood, and sought cooperation and advice from the FAO. Arni M. Mathiesen, Assistant Director-General of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, pledged FAO's support, assuring it will cope with the assistance to Japan in cooperation with Japanese officials concerned.

3. Marine eco-label

ICFA Members reported on the situation of marine eco-label and actions they have so far taken in their countries in this regard. Japan reported that eight types of fisheries have so far been certified under the Marine Eco-label Japan (MEL-Japan) scheme, with five

others to be certified shortly. (Note: final certification in October)

It also explained that, unlike in Western countries, actions as attaching upbraiding banners directly at retail stores will produce little or no consumer sympathy under the Japanese social environment. Therefore, efforts have been promoted in Japan with the emphasis to encourage voluntary applications from fishermen who want to appeal sustainability of their fishing. In Japan, it is not likely that the eco-labels come to widely accepted by the public through boycott actions against retailers.

4. Bottom trawling

ICFA members agreed to work together to urge national governments to continue efforts to manage fishing in sensitive ocean areas and adopted the following resolution. The resolution clarifies the contribution of bottom trawling to global food supply.

DEEP SEA HIGH SEAS FISHING RESOLUTION

The International Coalition of Fisheries Associations (ICFA) has unanimously adopted the following resolution regarding the contribution of bottom trawling to global food supply.

WHEREAS ICFA

Recognizes that a stable food supply is the most urgent global issue in the face of the explosive growth of the human population of the world;

Notes that the ocean occupies 70% of the surface of the earth with unutilized and undeveloped deep sea resources in abundance;

Recognizes that properly managed fisheries are an eco-friendly industry;

Applauds the findings of a recent FAO-WHO workshop that recommends increased consumption of seafood because "there is convincing evidence" that seafood consumption helps protect against heart disease and improve neural development in infants and young children;

Notes that fisheries have a role in supplying natural resources produced with minimum human interaction;

Recognizes that marine living resources, when harvested under a proper management scheme, can be a substantial, sustainable, healthy food source; and

Believes that any attempt to define deep sea fishing beyond the EEZs of coastal states and outside convention areas of regional fishery management organizations as "IUU fishing" will hamper both the 20-year struggle to eradicate IUU fishing and efforts to limit the adverse impacts of deep sea fishing.

ICFA MEMBERS THEREFORE RESOLVE to continue their active engagement in:

1. The production of a stable and continuous supply of seafood, particularly high quality seafood protein for present and future generations;
2. Fishing operations that ensure protection of the ocean environment, particularly marine ecosystems, including by participating in resource management at international, regional and national levels; and
3. The precautionary development of unutilized and undeveloped deep sea resources which can contribute to sustaining the human population.

ICFA MEMBERS FURTHER RESOLVE to communicate (in advance of the November 8, 9 and 11-16, 2011 debate of the UN General Assembly fisheries resolution) to their respective governments:

1. The need for continued precautionary, not reactionary, management measures (and in particular, area closures) with respect to deep sea fisheries;
2. The need to ensure that the UN General Assembly fisheries resolution remains a vehicle for broad policy guidance; and
3. That the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department of the Food and Agriculture Organization remains the UN specialized agency to which fisheries technical matters are referred.

5. Harassment of Japanese whale research program by Sea Shepherd

As stated by Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Michihiko Kano, on October 4, the research whaling program by Japanese vessels in the Antarctic in last season was suspended by violent harassment by radical animal-welfare group, Sea Shepherd. At the ICFA meeting, Japan distributed a paper that stated that it is committed to continue research whaling in the Antarctic in the future based on the right of sustainable utilization of marine living resources recognized under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling. Japan sought understanding of ICFA members on this issue.

Seafood Expo

Industry gets united at the seafood show for support of recovery of fisheries in tsunami-ridden areas

The 13th Japan International Seafood & Technology Expo was held at the Tokyo Big Sight on July 27-29, under the slogan to "Cheer Up Fisheries in Japan" in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami on March 11 this year.

The expo, organized by the Japan Fisheries Association, attracted 25,537 visitors during the three

day session. A total of 350 companies and organizations participated in 383 booths, including 14 foreign countries. Namibia and Uruguay made their first participation.

The opening of the show was marked by silent prayers for the victims of the Mega-Earthquake/Tsunami. In his opening address, JFA President Toshiro Shirasu stated: "The theme of the exposition is the support of fisheries in the disaster-hit area. Since the occurrence of the earthquake/tsunami and the accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant, the demand for seafood in Japan has been on a decline partly because of the consumers' inclination toward thrifty life. If this situation continues long, fisheries in Japan as a whole will weaken. It is the determination of the fisheries industry to get united in the support of the restoration of fisheries in Tohoku. I strongly hope this expo will provide strong motivation for the achievement of this goal."

"This expo is an opportunity of encounter between excellent seafoods and competent buyers. Our aim is to liven up seafood demand by promoting consumption.

Recently we were blessed with an encouraging news of the Japanese women's football team winning in the World Cup series. I was told that, in each game, the players wished to bring back smile to disaster-ravaged areas. Like them, we should hold fast to our indomitable will for restoration, not giving up our goal," Shirasu said.

On behalf of people in the disaster-stricken area, Shigeru Sugawara, mayor of Kesennuma, expressed appreciation for warm support extended from many places both in Japan and overseas. He said that the seafood processing plants in the city were entirely destroyed by the earthquake and tsunami, with half of the Fish Market being collapsed. But fishermen there showed strong commitment for recovery, and succeeded in reopening the Fish Market on June 23. Soon afterwards on June 28, purse-seine fishing vessels from Shizuoka Prefecture landed skipjack tunas at Kesennuma, followed by others. Many fishermen in other parts of Japan showed their commitment to come back to Kesennuma. We still face a difficult situation but we will do our best to deliver fish from the Sanriku area to consumers all over Japan, Sugawara said.

Despite the harsh plight, nine makers from the disaster-affected region exhibited their products at the show, with others participating through presentation of posters, samples and pamphlets.

Among major features of the expo, the Sushi Industry Association held presentation of traditional Japanese sushi cooking technique to respond to rising popularity of Japanese cuisine overseas. About 20 seminars were held on such topics as assistance to disaster-ridden areas, safety of seafood and land-based aquaculture.

Also, during the show period, the JFA organized, jointly with the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, a symposium under the theme of "Creation of new fisheries in Japan by overcoming the natural disaster," which included lectures and panel discussions. A total of 160 people attended the symposium.

Notable among foreign participants, Namibia sent a team of the Fisheries and Marine Resources Ministry officials--all of them women--headed by the Minister herself.



MEL Japan booth

Effects of DHA

Studies clarified DHA's effects for prevention of Alzheimer's

Maruha Nichiro Holdings, Inc., the largest fishing company in Japan, announced in Tokyo on August 31 that it has confirmed the effectiveness of docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) in preventing Alzheimer's, as a result of the clinical experiments it conducted jointly with Shimane University and other related institutions.

Shimane prefectural government conducted epidemiological research regarding the relations between Alzheimer's and the diet under the research project commissioned by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare from August 2004 to September 2008. The research team obtained the result that aged people who frequently eat fish have slower progress in retardation of cognitive functions. Based on these findings, the Medical Department of Shimane University, Shimane Prefectural Junior College (Izumo Campus), Ninjukai Kato Hospital and Maruha Nichiro jointly conducted an intervention experiment using fish sausage produced by Maruha Nichiro.

The experiment was conducted from November 2008 to December 2010 on 111 aged people at the average age of 73 living in Kawamoto Town of Shimane Prefecture, who were diagnosed as not suffering from Alzheimer's.

In the first year, the examinees were divided into two groups. It was so arranged that the members of one group eat two sausages a day, each containing 850 mg of DHA (i.e. the DHA group), and those of the other group eat two fish sausages a day, containing olive oil as additive (i.e. the placebo group). In the second year, all the examinees were made to consume fish sausages containing DHA.

In the first year, the DHA group showed increasing scores in cognitive function tests in six months after they started the intake, demonstrating significant improvement at the end of the year. The effectiveness of improving cognitive functions continued into the second year. Conspicuous improvement was also observed in the second year in the placebo group (who took placebo in the first year but consumed DHA in the second).

From these results, Michio Hashimoto, Associate Professor of Shimane University's Medical Department, concluded that the possibility is high for Alzheimer's to be prevented with the daily consumption of two fish sausages containing DHA.

Kazuya Yamashita, Vice President of Shimane Junior College, has been conducting studies on the theme of "overcoming the ages" based on the data that the rate of emergence of Alzheimer's increases as the age advances. He found that the values of DHA in the brain are high in the people age 80 or above who do not have brain contraction or expansion of the ventricle of the brain or asymptomatic cerebral infarction. In the case of an 81-year-old man, DHA values in the brain declined in the one year when he was taking placebo, with the cognitive function test scores also decreasing.

However, when he started to consume DHA sausage, DHA values turned upward and the test scores also improved.

DHA started to attract attention in 1989 when a British scientist published a thesis propounding that the higher intelligence of Japanese children can be attributed to the fish diet. However, according to Nobuyuki Sato, Director of Maruha Nichiro's Central Research Institute, it was Maruha Nichiro that had proved in 1986 for the first time in the world that DHA has an effectiveness to upgrade the memory learning capability. In 1988, the company applied for a patent for this finding. In subsequent years, Maruha Nichiro succeeded in mass production of DHA oil, developed the technique to make odorless DHA, and commercialized DHA additive food, one after another.

In 2005, the company's DHA additive "Risara sausage" was recognized as a "designated health food" for its effectiveness to lower neutral fat in the blood. Next spring, it plans to propose new products through which DHA can be consumed easily.

Maruha Nichiro estimates that the market of DHA products in Japan amounts to 1,500 tons worth ¥5 billion with the prospective annual growth of 2%. The world market is projected at 70,000 tons worth ¥130 billion, with annual growth of 8%.

Whaling

Premier says Japan should continue research whaling

Premier Minister Yoshihiko Noda said that Japan should continue its research whaling program in the Antarctic this coming season on the ground that Japan's position is based fully on scientific evidence.

He was responding to a question by Shigeru Ishiba, Chairman of the Policy Research Committee of the Liberal Democratic Party, at a Diet meeting on September 28.

In his question, Ishiba stated that the position Japan is taking with regard to the whale research program is reasonable and legitimate from the viewpoint of conservation of the marine ecosystem. If Japan halted the research at this point, it would mean succumbing to terrorism. Japan should continue its research whaling also to fulfill its responsibility to 36 countries which give support to Japan's cause at the International Whaling Commission (IWC), he added.

In this connection, Michihiko Kano, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, reaffirmed the position of the prime minister in a press conference on October 4.

Kano said Japan will continue its research with reinforced safety of the crew by sending a Fisheries Agency vessel to guard the research fleet. Last year, Japan was forced to suspend the research in the middle course because of the escalating violent harassment by the radical animal right group, Sea Shepherd Conservation Society.

Meanwhile, the Institute of Cetacean Research and Kyodo Senpaku Kaisha, Ltd., which owns the vessels used for Japan's research whaling, announced on December 9 that they had filed a lawsuit against the Sea Shepherd and its founder Paul Watson in a Seattle district court, seeking injunction against the group's sabotage to Japan's scientific whale research program in the Antarctic.