

Japan
Fisheries
Association



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Views and Opinions of Japan's Fisheries Industry

MEL Japan

Marine Eco-label Japan Established

Marine Eco-label Japan (MEL Japan) was established in Tokyo on December 6, 2007. MEL Japan is a joint effort by the fishing industry, the scientific community, conservation organizations, fish processors and distributors, consumers and food specialists committed to the promotion of the sustainability of Japanese fisheries. Finalization of the scheme, including the certification standards and procedural rules, is underway and the scheme is expected to be completed soon. MEL Japan, therefore, expects to begin receiving applications for certification and inspection around April, 2008.

1. Background

Amid the burgeoning world population and growing demand for seafood on a global scale, increased efforts are needed in conserving the marine ecosystem and avoiding excessive catches. According to the *Review of the State of World Marine Fishery Resources* of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 2005, of the 441 stock or species groups where assessment information is available, about 77 percent of the world stocks are either fully exploited, over-exploited, depleted, or recovering, and thus offer no room for further expansion. Under such circumstances, Ecolabeling of fish and fishery products has been promoted particularly in western countries.

Recognizing the global nature of the seafood industry and that Japan is one of the largest markets for fishery products, Japanese stakeholders in the fishing industry and fisheries management have decided to respond to the situation proactively and establish their own ecolabeling scheme, which is most suitable to the situation of the Japanese fisheries.

2. Basic principles

(1) Promotion of the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources and the conservation of marine ecosystems.

Marine Eco-label Japan (MEL Japan) "is intended to make provision for informed decisions of purchasers whose choice can be relied upon to promote and stimulate the sustainable use of fishery resources," as stipulated in the FAO Guidelines.



(2) Co-management

MEL Japan pursues utilizing the merits of co-management which have been practiced in order to ensure the sustainable use of aquatic resources in Japan and Asia from olden times. The idea of co-management is that fishermen share in the role of fisheries management and resource enhancement. In fishing communities in Japan, fishers have developed the idea of managing local fishery resources jointly and on their own will in order to ensure subsistence of their communities. As a result, practical and effective resource management-oriented fisheries, incomparable in other parts of the world, have developed and expanded in Japan. In the

background of this development, one can point out the presence of many small-scale fishers and fishing boats as well as a variety of target fish species in fisheries. A framework has functioned that encourages fishers and others related to fisheries, who are users of the resources, to fulfill their role in resource management voluntarily and individually. Fishers and regional and central governments are united in participating in the current framework for resource recovery as well. MEL Japan, therefore, effectively applies the concept of co-management to certification as a means to facilitate and reinforce the work of the scheme. MEL Japan aims to create a positive cycle in which fishers, through ecolabel certification, give closer attention to resource management, reinforce cooperation with scientists and administrators, and contribute to the accumulation of scientific data and the improvement of information through fishing activities.

(3) Scientific and objective certification

MEL Japan is structured by a council, a board and committees that include representatives of fisheries management authorities, the fishing industry, fishworkers organizations, the scientific community, environmental interest groups, fish processors, traders and retailers as well as consumers, which realize balanced and fair participation by all interested parties. MEL Japan also ensures scientific and objective certification by independent certification bodies which form a certification team comprising scientists and other experts with a profound understanding of the Japanese fisheries and marine environment.

3. Affordable costs of certification

For the ecolabeling scheme to be accepted widely, it is crucial that it contribute to the sustainability of fisheries. What MEL Japan pursues is a practicable framework in which diverse fishers—large and small-scale alike—proactively engaged in sustainable fisheries can obtain certification at low costs.

To that end, the scheme of MEL Japan is being developed into a system that requires the recovery of actual costs only and avoids duplication of work, by utilizing to the maximum extent existing data acquired

through the management efforts that have already been undertaken. Furthermore, the system is non-commercial and non-profit in nature, and MEL Japan itself and third party certification bodies require the minimum necessary fees for maintenance of the project. Needless to say, minimizing certification costs does not mean compromising the sustainability requirements, and sustainability of the examined fisheries is the prerequisite for certification.

4. Present goal

The goal of MEL Japan at the moment is to promote its recognition in the Japanese market, with the aim to gain wider acceptance. MEL Japan also aims to respond to the needs of foreign markets to promote the export of sustainable Japanese seafood.

MEL Japan received favorably at Seafood Summit 2008

The Secretariat for MEL Japan reported on February 6 that the eco-labeling program was introduced and received favorably at Seafood Summit 2008 held in Barcelona, Spain, for four days from January 27.

More than 500 people from the distribution and retailing industries (including major supermarkets such as Wal-Mart), the fishing industry, and conservation groups participated in the Summit sponsored by Seafood Choices Alliance.

Three panel discussions at the Summit were held on such subjects as seafood safety, the sustainable utilization of fishery resources, food traceability, seafood eco-labeling, and the measures that can be taken by distributors against IUU (illegal, unregulated and unreported) fishing activities.

Dr. Makoto Miyake, adviser to the Japan-Tuna Fisheries Cooperative, who reported on the world's bluefin tuna market, made a presentation on the establishment of MEL Japan as well. Dr. Miyake explained Japan's efforts to build a highly transparent and credible eco-labeling system with the aim to ensure the sustainable use of fishery resources in Japan. His presentation was received favorably by many Summit participants, the MEL Japan Secretariat said.

ICFA Annual Meeting 2007

ICFA members united over the issues of highseas trawling, Marine Protected Areas and eco-labeling

The annual meeting of the International Coalition of Fisheries Associations (ICFA) was held in Rome, October 2-4, 2007. Iceland, the European

Union, Australia, Canada, Korea, Spain, Taiwan, New Zealand, Norway, the United States, Peru and Japan participated. The members discussed various issues that

could cause unreasonable impacts on the world's fisheries, and agreed that they will unite among themselves to have ICFA's position reflected in the discussions at various international fora.

In the major discussion at the meeting, Japan reported on the results of the first Joint Meeting of Regional Tuna Fisheries Management Organizations (RMFOs), held in Kobe, Japan, in January 2007. J

apan explained the joint resolution of the World Tuna Purse Seine Organization (WTPO) and the Organization for the Promotion of Responsible Tuna Fisheries (OPRT) regarding the promotion of restraint on excessive tuna fishing capacity which was one of the focal issues at the meeting, and proposed that ICFA support the resolution.

However, a consensus was not achieved as New Zealand, which aims to further develop its tuna fishing, was opposed to that proposal. New Zealand, though, admitted that it is seriously concerned about the present situation where the management capability of RFMOs is put to question, although it was opposed to the position that the limitation of fishing capacity is the most necessary means for the solution of the tuna issue for the time being. ICFA faces the task to continue consultations on this issue and develop a unified position at the earliest possible date.

Japan also explained the continued dysfunctional state of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and the blatant violent actions at sea by the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society and Greenpeace, and called for further support from ICFA on this issue.

Further, Norway expressed its concerns that the IWC's Scientific Committee has now become a forum of political battle, rather than that for discussing scientific views objectively.

Other issues discussed at the meeting were as follows.

(1) Highseas trawling issue before the United Nations

The management scheme of this fishery will be reviewed at the United Nations in 2009. ICFA members confirmed that this issue has been taken up by existing RFMOs such as the North Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) and that work toward the establishment of new RFMOs in the North Pacific and the South Pacific has been generally advancing at a smooth pace.

ICFA agreed that it will act on relevant governments to expedite this work and the fishing industry will cooperate for progress toward this goal.

(2) Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

It was agreed at the World Summit for Sustainable

Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002 to establish networks for MPAs. In 2005, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) started the work to develop technical guidelines for establishing MPAs. ICFA is concerned about the expansion of MPAs, — which is apparently understood as a trophy of the conservationist movement —, and has agreed to support the FAO's initiative to streamline and address the issue.

Specifically, ICFA agreed that the locating of MPAs is one of the means to increase fishery resources from the viewpoint of food security. It agreed that an MPA, like other various resource management measures, is one of the tools in the comprehensive tool box to ensure the sustainable utilization of fishery resources, and should be used in a rational manner based on science.

(3) Seafood eco-labeling

ICFA members discussed ways to ensure the sustainability of fisheries and the marine environment as well as ways to communicate to the public the need to promote sustainability. Japan's presentation on its approach to launch its Marine Eco-label Japan (MEL Japan) attracted the attention of the participants.

The discussion centered on who is the most appropriate to assess sustainability, and many members believed that governments should assume that role. Some expressed the view that it is not right for one private enterprise, such as the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), to judge between "good" and "bad" fisheries.

In connection with this topic, questions were raised that the phrase "fully exploited," used often in the reports on the state of the world's fishery resources, can send a misleading message to the public. For instance, the following description can be found on the FAO's website:

"Marine capture fisheries resources are usually considered close to full exploitation worldwide with some 52 percent fully exploited, 24 percent of them over exploited, depleted or recovering from depletion and 21 percent only with some capacity to produce more than they presently do."

The overview of the world's fishery resource status largely differs depending on how the expression "fully exploited" is understood. All members expressed concerns that "fully exploited" could be erroneously taken by people not versed with fisheries as the state wherein the fishery has been completely exhausted."

"To use the fishery resources to their maximum limit" means effective utilization of the resources to their maximum limit without causing them to deplete. Members agreed on the need to make further efforts to communicate the actual situation to the public more correctly.

Whaling

New relationships between whales and humans

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It is deplorable to see an atmosphere in some quarters of the world that approves at-sea attacks against the Japanese whaling fleet in the Antarctic by combatant animal-welfare groups. At last year's annual meeting, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) adopted a resolution condemning their actions and urging them to refrain from such activities. Nevertheless, the extremist groups once again staged similar attacks against Japanese vessels this year.

The IWC should have no excuse for succumbing to such terrorist violence against scientific research, duly recognized under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling.

The international community also should take a determined stance to block such blatant criminal actions. The IWC should make clear that it will not condone any action of violence and take effective measures against it.

The illegal activities by radical animal welfare groups are obviously against reason in the eyes of everyone, even children. Following is an example of such an observation made by a 12-year-old student in Japan.

A number of years ago, Ayukawa, a port town near Ishinomaki, thrived as a whaling base. In former years, there was coexistence between whales and the Japanese people. But the days with whales have now become a past memory. Will the scene of a port town coexisting with whales no longer come back?

My father works on a whale research mothership. He has been doing this job since I was in the sixth grade of elementary school. He spends many days on the whaling ship--at times two months at home and at other times at least two weeks. He goes to Hiroshima to board the whaling mothership bound for the Antarctic. He engages in the research on the ecology of whales living in the oceans.

In the past, whales were exposed to the risk of extinction because of over-exploitation by humans. What we did not know about whale ecology before and how they are recovering has now been made clearer. It seems that research has advanced to the point of showing the state of whale stocks for which catches by humans will present no problem.

But my father's research vessel was attacked by the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, an organization claiming to protect whales. Frankly, I was shocked when I heard about this news from my mother. Luckily, my father was not injured but his fellow crew members were wounded on their faces by the attack. I also heard that this was not the first time they assaulted the research vessels. Previously, they scratched the sides of the research ships or threw some objects at them.

Why do they engage in such activities? I felt this question arising in my heart, almost a feeling of anger.

Organizations such as Sea Shepherd and Greenpeace are opposed to catching whales. They are trying to save whales which had been subjected to over-exploitation

and driven to the risk of extinction in the past. And they believe that whales should not be killed because they are the same living creatures as human beings. This is what anti-whaling people have in mind. I think it is good for them to think that they want to save whales. But, at the same time, I have a question whether it is right to kill animals other than whales. Whales are not the only animals living on this earth. We humans and other creatures on this earth take the lives of other living things in order to live. If this should be stopped, then no living creature can survive on this earth.

All living things, including humans, have to take other lives in order to survive. This is a condition that no one can avoid. I think that accepting this assumption and avoiding taking the lives of other creatures more than is necessary means coexistence in respect for the lives of each other.

Thinking this way, I cannot understand what anti-whaling groups are really trying to protect. I wonder what they actually want to do because the issue of whales cannot be solved by violence.

We, living things, are supporting each other--sometimes by using other lives. If we really understand this, we may not have confrontation over whales, and whaling in a good sense can be started again.

My father is researching whale ecology somewhere in the Antarctic today. His research is to build a new relationship between whales and humans, by respecting each others lives. It is my hope that, as in former days in Japan, boats carrying whales will return to the port and bring back vitality to the port town of Ishinomaki through whales.

(This essay won the President Prize of the Ishinomaki Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the Painting and Essay Contests to mark the Whale Forum 2007.)