

**Japan
Fisheries
Association**

ISARIBI
漁火
Fishing Fire

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Views and Opinions of Japan's Fisheries Industry

President's message

JFA chief stresses the need to promote domestic seafood demand and expand exports taking a chance on the global boom for Japanese cuisine

In the January issue of the Suisankai, the Japanese-language bulletin of the Japan Fisheries Association (JFA), President Toshiro Shirasu stressed the importance of making all-out efforts to boost seafood exports with the aim to revive the nation's fisheries industry in general, and the resuscitation of the fisheries in the region hit by the great earthquake and tsunami more than three years ago.

The Japanese economy is now regaining its strength, as witnessed in the general recovery of corporate performance and the upswing of the stock market. Expectations are high that domestic demand for seafood will expand and fish prices will take an upturn, backed by further economic recovery. According to surveys by the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), "washoku" (Japanese cuisine) is now enjoying the highest popularity among various cuisines of the world. Needless to say, fish constitutes the main pillar of the Japanese food culture. The global boom in fish consumption is further spurred by the recent registration of "washoku" by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This will certainly provide great potential for fisheries growth in Japan, a country adjoining the Northwestern Pacific which is the world's most productive fishing ground.

The fisheries industry of Japan is now faced with an important task of restoring its vitality by bolstering both the demand and supply of fish.

In order to enhance the demand for seafood as a whole, it is essential to expand the consumption of seafood and propagate a fish diet through major campaigns such as the "Fast Fish" and "Pride Fish" programs. In the area of seafood exports, I am pleased to note that groundwork was laid last year to accelerate the process of compliance with HACCP certification for exports of Japanese seafood to the European Union market, and actual implementation of the certification has become a reality. In the years to come, our industry will redouble its efforts to promote exports of Japanese-produced seafood by further strengthening cooperation with JETRO. In order to ensure supply to

respond to demand, we will step up efforts in three major areas--ensuring labor power, fishing vessels and fishery resources.

Fisheries have an important role not only in supplying seafood to Japanese nationals on a stable basis but also in making possible the survival of regional communities and a balanced development of national resources.

There is a variety of tasty seafood from region to region and from beach to beach throughout Japan. Some regions have their specific assets to be proud of, for example, the status of the top landing port in Japan and the largest fish market in Asia. With these assets at their core, each region can publicize the attractiveness of its seafood. Each region can vitalize its fisheries by attracting people from other areas thereby promoting economic development.

About four years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, fish landings in the affected region have recovered almost to the level of the pre-disaster period, thanks to the assistance of the government and the efforts of local people, notably those in the fisheries industry. There remain, however, many hurdles to clear, such as the development of sales channels for seafood processors. We are still midway towards restoration and rehabilitation. Negative rumors on regional seafood, generated by the accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant, are still lingering. The fisheries industry in Japan is determined



to continue its all-out effort towards a full recovery and resuscitation at the earliest possible time.

Osaka Seafood Show

Osaka Expo attracts record number of 14,956 visitors

The 12th International Osaka Seafood & Technology Expo, organized by the Japan Fisheries Association (JFA), was held at ATC Hall in the Asia Pacific Trade Center on Feb. 19 and 20.

A total of 222 companies exhibited their products and technologies in 230 booths, as compared with 254 companies and 265 booths last year. The number of visitors during the 2-day show totaled the highest-ever 14,956.

Osaka is now gaining vitality as Japan's second largest commercial city, attracting an increasing number of tourists both from Japan and overseas. The recently-built tallest skyscraper in Japan, Abeno Harukas, and the Universal Studios Japan, a popular theme park, present themselves as major Osaka tourist attractions.

The city is world-known for its excellent food culture. Last year, "washoku" (Japanese cuisine) was designated by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. As fish constitutes an essential component of "washoku," it means that Japan's culinary culture cherishing fish has come to be recognized worldwide.

As last year, Agri-Food Expo was held concurrently with the seafood show at the same site, featuring domestically-produced farm and livestock products, including processed products. The two expos combined constituted the largest food fair in western Japan, with the display of about 4,000 food items.

During the expo period, individual business matching services were offered by the Secretariat so that exhibitors and visiting buyers can deepen their business negotiations.

The food export business section, sponsored by the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), accommodated the needs of participants in promoting



MEL Japan booth

overseas exports of Japanese seafood. Further, the JFA held an export promotion seminar, in which lectures were given on the themes of EU-HACCP and Halal food for the Islamic markets.

In the MEL Japan booth, the Morozaki Chamber of Commerce and Industry publicized the recently-obtained MEL-Japan certification of the Aichi Prefecture White-bait and Sandlance Boat Seine Association fishery, mainly through sampling of its products.

MEL Japan

MEL Japan given high marks by the Thai Government at Marine Fisheries Ecolabel Workshop

Masashi Nishimura
Marine Eco-Label Japan Secretariat

The Workshop on National Ecolabel for Marine Capture Fisheries was held in Bangkok, Thailand, on January 13-15, 2015. From Japan, I participated in the Workshop on behalf of the Marine Eco-Label Japan (MEL Japan) Secretariat. A brief outline of the meeting is given below.

The purpose of the Workshop, organized by the Thai Government, was to discuss the possibility of establishing a national seafood ecolabeling scheme--like MEL Japan--that is set up by stakeholders of the fisheries industry of a particular country. The Workshop took the form of an invitation of experts from around the world by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), a United Nations agency that leads international efforts to defeat hunger.



The MEL Japan Secretariat was among the experts receiving the FAO's invitation. I made a presentation on the process of MEL Japan's establishment, the state of fishery resource management in Japan, and the administration of the scheme in order to contribute to Thailand's initiative.

As a result, MEL Japan received a high evaluation by the Thai Government as a model that can provide the most useful reference to Thailand's initiative to set up its own ecolabeling scheme. Another significant aspect was that the participants could have in-depth discussions on the sustainability of fisheries (not in Thailand alone but in other interested developing countries as well), the steps to be taken towards starting a certification process, and the course to be taken by a national eco-label scheme. I consider that, in all likelihood, no other meetings so far have carried out such in-depth discussions on the subject of national seafood eco-labeling as this Workshop did.

1. Participants and the process of the Workshop

About 40 representatives participated in the Workshop,



including those from the Thai Government, the U.S. Government, the FAO, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), Friend of the Sea, Dolphin Safe, the Alaskan Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI), INFOFISH and INFOSAMAK.

In a broad perspective, the Workshop was carried out in the following manner. On the first day, invited experts from overseas ecolabel schemes and organizations made their presentations. In the morning of the second day, Thai delegates explained the situation of their domestic fisheries and fishery stock management, and in the afternoon, Workshop participants were divided into two optional groups to discuss the possibility of establishing a national seafood ecolabeling scheme. On the third day, the Workshop met in full session to further examine the group discussions, and develop a "Summary," which served as advice to the Thai Government.

2. Summary of the Workshop

Following two days of presentations and group interaction the Workshop concluded that establishing a comprehensive national seafood ecolabeling scheme for Thailand would, at this point, be challenging and perhaps premature.

It was agreed that a first priority in considering the next steps would be to determine the objective or preferred outcome of any such scheme including whether it would be intended to inform consumers in either the domestic market or the international market or both. Answers to these questions would guide factors to be taken into consideration in developing an ecolabeling scheme.

At this stage in the discussion the Workshop agreed that, while evidence confirms the value of an ecolabel in certain cases in accessing markets, differentiating a country's seafood products and promoting and rewarding sustainable management practices, among other positive outcomes, it was not clear for Thailand, at this time, whether there is consensus on the scope or the goal of a national ecolabel or a national strategy to establish an ecolabel or whether the establishment

of a scheme is practical or cost effective. The Workshop felt that any initiative on labeling should be seen as a component within a larger national strategy of sustainable fisheries management. This could include other issues such as Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and aquaculture development.

To establish a better understanding of the next steps, the Workshop agreed that the Thai Government should initiate a dialogue with a broad range of stakeholders including private sector entities, NGOs, consumers and civil society to share information, increase understanding of the value to consumers and producers of ecolabeled seafood and determine priorities in moving forward.

The Workshop acknowledged that Thailand and its management system may not yet be in a position to move forward on a broad ecolabeling initiative but that perhaps identification of potential fisheries that would act as a pilot project could be undertaken. The choice of a pilot project would be determined according to the objectives that had been decided for a Thai label e.g., a fishery targeting exports, fisheries generating by-catch for fish meal, or an artisanal fishery targeting niche products for domestic markets. This may provide guidance as a first step.

Finally, the Workshop took note from presentations of invited guests that establishing sustainability criteria, setting up a chain of custody or traceability system and engaging a third party certifier to ensure credibility is difficult, costly and time consuming and that all of these factors should be taken into consideration in the context of the existing global certification debate.

Workshop participants agreed that the event had been very valuable, instructive and thought-provoking, and thanked the Thai Department of Fisheries and the FAO for organizing the event.

3. Expectations toward MEL Japan

Expectations were expressed by Thai Government delegates that MEL Japan has much to be referred to for fisheries in Thailand because MEL Japan is designed to certify fisheries in Japan, which are characterized by



Nishimura making presentation on the Scheme and Operation of MEL Japan

many small-scale fisheries that capture many kinds of fish. In contrast, the schemes in the United States and Europe deal with larger-scale fisheries, which are largely difficult to serve as references for fisheries in Thailand. In this sense, MEL Japan was presumably appreciated by

Keys to success

Good management is essential

- * Certification scheme can only assess and promote management
- * Make good use of existing institutions and activities
 - Supporters all over the country (National and local management schemes, fishermen's cooperatives, academics, consumer organizations, NGOs)
- * Nurture good cooperative environment
 - Use the eco-label to promote cooperation
 - Promote local industries and products
- * Find a pioneer

Keys to success which the MEL Japan Secretariat presented at the Workshop, based on its experience, as reference to cope with the difficulty to be encountered in establishing marine ecolabeling schemes in developing countries.

FAO officials as a national eco-label model that can serve as a reference for countries such as Thailand although the FAO is not in the position to assess schemes.

4. Toward more equitable participation in international trade

In the fourteenth session of the SUB-COMMITTEE ON FISH TRADE (Bergen, Norway, 24-28 February 2014), the Sub-Committee expressed concerns over a range of issues relating to ecolabeling schemes, including their potential to create trade restrictions and generate increased costs. Many Members called upon the FAO to provide technical assistance to developing countries in meeting market access requirements for fisheries certification and in improving national capacity for sustainable fisheries management.

Under these circumstances, I would like to express high esteem to the positive posture of the Thai Government to hold this Workshop instead of staying idle in face of the issues. As stated in the Summary of the Workshop, establishing a comprehensive national seafood ecolabeling scheme for Thailand might be challenging and premature. However, it is hoped that fisheries stakeholders of the world make creative efforts to establish schemes to appreciate and promote the efforts of developing countries to improve fishery management so that they will not be excluded from international trade. MEL Japan is committed to continue its efforts to promote national ecolabeling through cooperation with those countries and the FAO.

Before concluding, I would like to express my gratitude to the Thai government and the FAO for the invitation to the Workshop.

