



September 30th, 2020

Marine Eco-Label Japan (MEL) Council

## **MEL NEWS VOL. 30 (ENGLISH EDITION)**

Dear Our Readers:

Here are four topics that we would like to share with you as follows:

### **1. MEL Certification Updates**

Tsukiji Uoichiba Co., Ltd. gained CoC certifications this month. The total number of certifications is 65 (5 fishery, 30 aquaculture and 30 CoC) by the end of this month. Annual assessments are being conducted in series thanks to hard work by the parties involved despite the coronavirus. There are 60 cases under the assessment (certification body has accepted application) and 70 cases under pre-assessment or under-consulting right now. The former MEL certification will be expired by the end of January 2021 of which we repeatedly inform certified entities of MEL V1.

### **2. Standard Setting Committee Related**

We held Standard Setting Committee (Fishery, Aquaculture and CoC combined) on Sep 15th. The MEL Council obtained an approval by the committee for some minor modifications of CoC standard related documents.

Although a certification body (CB) works on “peer-review” system themselves, we presented a plan of its official introduction into CB’s assessment process to the committee in order to improve quality of the certification and assessment. The MEL Council received the nod from the committee. The member said that it is important to introduce the system first, and then gradually heighten its quality preserving impartiality and independency. Finally, it would be advisable to establish an organization independent from the scheme owner and CB.

Further, working with CB and getting an approval from the board of directors after scheme-document is prepared, then it will be reflected in the RCB (Requirements for Certification Bodies), which is very important for MEL as long as it evolves toward the marine ecolabel fully recognized by the global society.

### 3. Voice from Certified Entities

We would like to introduce a message from Mr. Tetsuji Suzuki, Managing Director of Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations. He talks about current situation of the fisheries industry in Fukushima.

*“What’s Going on in Fukushima Fisheries Industry”*

*After the nuclear accident, we conducted test fishing operation and, since then, have been finding a way for a full-scale operation. Under the given circumstances, the Covid-19 forces to immobilize society and economy activities, and decreases shipment to food service sector - the main customer base for our seafood. Furthermore, the price is plummeting sharply, in particular, on premium species, which is the signature category for our local species brand of “Joban-Mono.” Although it is turning to autumn and winter or the best season for fishery, we cannot see what happens in the future.*

*Despite such hard time, we gained the MEL V2 certification last year so that our mackerel of purse seine fishery was regarded as eco-friendly and sustainable fishery. We also gained CoC certification and are ready to build an integrated supply chain from production down to a dining table, but recognition of marine ecolabel is still low in general. We will execute business expansion of MEL certified products collaborating with the parties involved and putting in place production capacity.*

*Although it takes more time to see full recovery of Fukushima fisheries industry, we continuously pursue gaining fishery and CoC certifications of other species and promote sustainable fishery and fish meal activities.*

*Written by Mr. Tetsuji Suzuki*



**MEL Certified Frozen Japanese Mackerel Fillets.**

**Three logos on the carton: MEL V2, Joban Brand (local) and Fukushima Fisheries Association.**

#### 4. Column

We are glad to introduce Mr. Nobuyuki Yagi, a professor of University of Tokyo. Yagi-san helped a lot on MEL's global standardization process. He is involved with research of diversified fishery in Southeast Asia, and gives us useful advice in terms of building relation with Asian countries.

*“How to give Japanese Consumer a Better Understanding of Sustainability Certification”*

*I strongly believe that although MEL is the one of the marine ecolabels or sustainability certifications, it needs further effort to penetrate it into Japanese society. Basically, the word of “sustainability” is little bit hard to understand for Japanese. Jizoku Kanousei (持続可能性), called in Japanese, is the one that we rarely use in normal life. Furthermore, some people are puzzled by difference between environment conservation and Eco, and sustainability. Experts can visualize the word of sustainable development, frequently used in UN or other global conferences, which must be fostered together with not only environment conservation, but social and economic activities. It is necessary that such knowledge is delivered to many consumers, and that we repeatedly appeal that essential concept of “sustainability” is beyond just environmental conservation and has deeply linked with our society and economy.*



**Prof. Nobuyuki Yagi**

*Concept of “certification” is hard to understand for Japanese consumers, as well. “Certification” refers to operation of putting on some kind of mark or label where a thing is verified and different from a similar thing. This idea is based on “Theory of Innate Badness.” If we follow “Theory of Innate Goodness,” instead, just trust others because they are a good guy fundamentally. We do not need “certification” because of no-suspicion. In particular, since everybody knows each other and they have high norm consciousness like in Japan’s local community, they tend to think that way. If we say, we cannot trust the food product made by a neighbor through painstaking technique because it does not have “certification” in line with European standard, you may get a risk that they denounce you saying you are bad-mannered because you cannot trust people or them, maybe they throw a stone against you... Whether the product is certified or made by a neighbor, we need to affirm each value without bias.*

*Basically, there are many opinions out there. After the Great East Japan Earthquake, there are divided viewpoints between those who avoid seafood because of radioactive risk and those who do not care much about that. Even now - more than nine years since then, such trend has still remained. Moreover, there would cause further disruption if we make an argument for choosing which side is scientifically correct. The point is that we should recognize there is a diversity in human way of thinking. We should not push one idea on others ignoring their independence. I think a root of bullying problem in Japan comes from such ground. We should rather make effort*

*to understand different opinions. After Buddhism was introduced into Japan, there have remained syncretization of Shinto with Buddhism.*

*I think it is reasonable that MEL is managed to adjust Japan's local situation as sustainability certification originated from here. Through respecting Japanese consciousness and achieving sustainable development in flexible ways, it should increase understanding in Japan.*

*Written by Mr. Nobuyuki Yagi*

#### **POSTSCRIPT**

There is a bestselling book called “What Happens in Japan’s Ocean due to Global Warming” (author: Tomoyuki Yamamoto). Being lured by an eye-catching copy of “just one-degree Celsius increase of seawater temperature changes the waters to another world.” There is nothing better than the nature - we are impressed by the author, as a science journalist, who goes to the field to see what happens. Mr. Hiroshi Terashima, a member of Advisory Board of MEL Council, highly recommends this book in his blog, too.

We held MEL Mini-Workshop on September 30th during Japan International Seafood Show 2020. We had a lively exchange of views among participants from different industries such as fisheries, aquaculture, wholesalers, retailers, academic sector, consumer group and environmental group. Feedback will be introduced in the next edition.

If you have any comments or suggestions, feel free to let us know!

Marine Eco-Label Japan Council Secretariat

Sankaido Bldg., 1-9-13 Akasaka Minato-ku, Tokyo 107-0052 Japan

URL: <https://melj.jp/eng/>

Email: [info@melj.jp](mailto:info@melj.jp)