



October 31st, 2020

Marine Eco-Label Japan (MEL) Council

## **MEL NEWS VOL. 31 (ENGLISH EDITION)**

Dear Our Readers:

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

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

There are seven CoC certifications were added so the total number of certifications is 72 (5 fishery, 30 aquaculture and 37 CoC) by the end of this month. Two intermediate traders at Toyosu Fish Market gained CoC certification. We would like to express our respect for those who have been working for application process before the coming event of “Symposium for Understanding of Marine Resources from Toyosu Fishery Market.”

Although certification proceeding seems to be a little bit delay because we have introduced peer-review system into the assessment procedure, which, we believe, helps enhance quality of assessment. To our knowledge, there are around 100 applications being in the process of consulting and pre-assessment phases

### **2. Tokyo International Seafood Show**

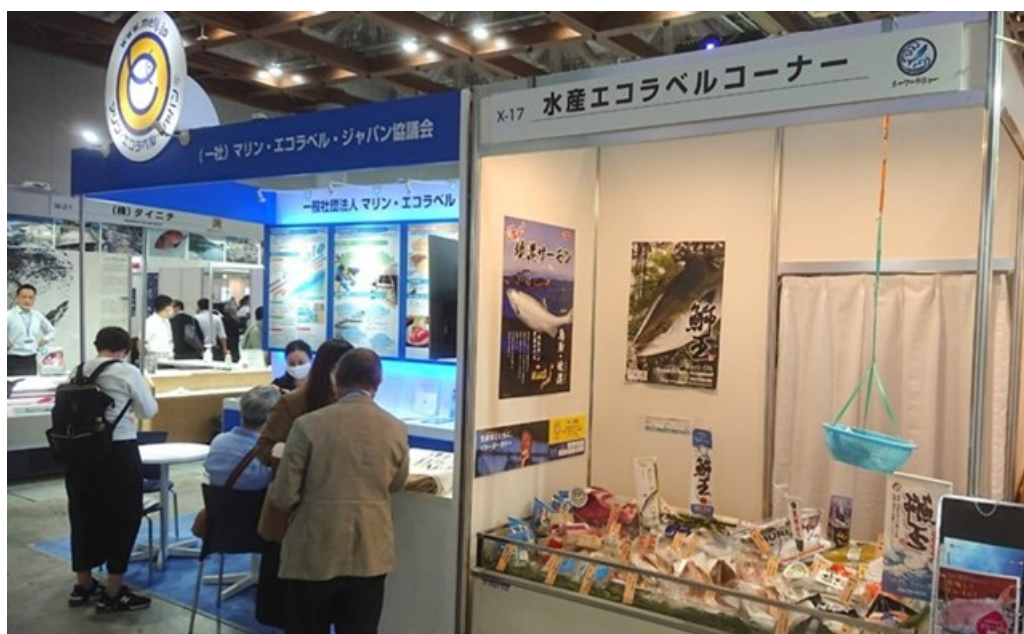
MEL Council participated in the Tokyo International Seafood Show organized by the Japan Fisheries Association from September 30th to October 2nd. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the scale was reduced taking care of social distancing. MEL Council run own booth and another one called “Marine Eco Label Section” for the certified entities such as Yonkyu, Mie Prefectural Federation of Fisheries, Hyoshoku and Kanoya Fishery Cooperative. Unlike MEL’s sole exhibition, it looked very powerful presentation that we could exchange business conversation with many customers and partners.

On the first day, we held “Marine Eco-Label Mini Workshop” and had a panel discussion about the theme of “What is the value and role that Marine Eco-Label can deliver in the post-COVID-19 society.” There are 23 persons participated from fisheries, retailers, wholesalers, consumer group, research institutes, environmental group, accreditation body, certification body, media and overseas scheme owner (Alaska RFM). Besides, there was another room prepared for more than thirty audiences. Because the conference room was small and voice system had some trouble, we are sorry for the inconvenience.

However, we received vivid comments from the panelists as to what Japan's fishery industry and society are facing right now. Above all, there was a striking comment about the lack of education opportunities for adults and children to learn "sustainability." It reminds us of a school visit program at Kuramae Elementary School in Tokyo where we saw how kids showed high interest in "sustainable society" which made us think about how education is so important.

Hiroyuki Matsuda, a facilitator of the discussion, gave us a closing comment, "We found many things from the discussion. For instance, the concept of ESG (Environment, Sustainability and Governance) must be the keyword for us. Japan's marine resources and sustainability of fishery industry could be preserved by our actions, which strike a chord with many people emotionally and functionally. Ensuring the transparency of eco-label, we should move forward together."

Keeping the minutes and taking into consideration their suggestions and opinions, MEL Council will deepen discussion with our partners, and move forward to do contribution in the post-COVID-19 society.



Tokyo International Seafood Show (MEL Booth and Certified Products Display)

### 3. Voice from Certified Entities

We would like to introduce a message from Mr. Nobuo Nagamoto, Representative Director of Azuma-Cho Fishery Cooperative Association. Azuma-Cho is the largest aqua-producer of Yellowtail (Buri) in Japan with the world-famous brand of Bri-Oh - maybe some of you know!

*"Marine Eco-Label Japan for Sustainability"*

*Essentially, the business environment of Japan's fishery industry must be sustained by the fishery operators themselves who actually are engaged in fishery, but the reality of Japan or "Fishery Powerhouse" is changing compared with the 50 years ago. We are facing three critical*

problems; downturn of domestic seafood consumption unlike overseas trend, lack of successors in the fishery industry and declining of catch in the sea around Japan. Taking Pacific Saury as an example, natural marine resources are getting unstable in these days.

Although we fully understand scientific and quantitative approach like TAC - world's conservation scheme for marine resources, we believe we should take flexible measures against such issues in the unforeseeable natural world. Under such situations, there is the paradigm shift from harvesting fisheries to farming fisheries, and big fishery companies enter into the aqua-farming business and start launching of diversified species farming on a large-scale basis.

Azuma-Cho Fishery Coop gained the MEL Aquaculture Certification in February 2019 as the first entities in Japan, and has been focusing on developing sales channels in Japan and overseas. At the beginning, we expected MEL Japan's increased awareness through attending several seminars and overseas exhibitions.



**Azuma-Cho's Bri-Oh Brand**

Advocating the importance of sustainability and conservation of marine resources, MSC and ASC had already been building a rule of CoC certification in the entire supply chain. There were many entities which gained MSC and ASC certification (Azuma-Cho gained ASC in June 2019), I still remember how hard to proceed what we think about due to the gap of Japan's specific aquaculture operation at that time.

It is very important for MEL Japan that it should be recognized as a global marine eco-label as a representative of Japan or "Fishery Powerhouse." I strongly hope that it becomes a main pillar of seafood supply as Japan's prestige of food safety and security, and high quality. As a milestone, the momentum to gain the certification was increasing at that time aiming at the Tokyo Olympic 2020. Unfortunately, it has been postponed, I hope such momentum would rekindle again.

I take a look at the wide variety of MEL-certified products displayed at the MEL Japan booth in the Tokyo Seafood Show 2020, which makes me feel comfortable as to how the persons involved work so hard. In terms of next challenges, we should continuously



**MEL-Certified Products with Bri-Oh**

*enhance MEL's popularity from producers, retailers, distributors and consumers standpoints, and not neglect voices of "just enough to get the certification." We should utilize the marine eco-label certification and aim at the sustainable fishery industry, which must be our future.*

*In the last part of comment, since undertaking effort for sustainable development on human, society and environment across the world, the World Food Programme (WFP) was awarded the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize as their contribution to humanitarian assistance. In addition to the fact that a large number of people in developing countries are suffering from famine and poverty, COVID-19 is worsening such "already bad" situation. David Beasley, executive director of WFP, said, "Until the day we have a medical vaccine, food is the best vaccine against chaos," which makes me once again think about the meaning of sustainability.*

*Written by Mr. Nobuo Nagamoto*

#### **4. Column**

We are glad to introduce Ms. Yuko Hirano, a deputy chairperson of SHUFUREN or Association of Consumer Organizations. Hirano-san attended the Mini Workshop at Tokyo Seafood Show 2020 and gave us valuable comments from consumer stand point.

*"Valuing the Seas Connected with the Life"*

*Ten years ago, I thought that climate change occurred in distant countries. But, recently, natural disasters are affecting even the city area, which makes me feel anxious.*

*Talking about the SDGs – I feel it would take time to get popularity - according to newspaper's survey conducted in March, at the top three interests are; Good Health and Well-Being (#3), No Poverty (#1), and Climate Action (#13). The Life below Water (#14) was that 23.2% for man and 30.1% for female evaluated it as 5th place. Since young people in their teens and 20s show the highest interest in SDGs, I strongly feel such young people are sensitive at the climate change comparing with the adult group.*



**Ms. Yuko Hirano**

*I participated in the event called "Global Climate Strike" in September last year. At the meeting place in front of United Nations University, there are 28,000 people across the world or 165 countries coming from various backgrounds like babies in a pushchair, students as a group or with family, LGBT people, persons with disability and senior couples. The march was realized by the call from young generation like Greta Thunberg; students told me that they joined the march responding to the call from SNS.*



*It would be hard for general consumer to ensure that certain information is fake or true because the amount of information overwhelms and people are weak against that. However, young generation tend to share information at once through social networking, they respond correctly if they receive reliable information.*

*With regard to trend of purchase behavior for seafood, including my friends, people tend to use home-delivery service provided by Radishbo-ya or Coop. (both are famous as a specialty retail in Japan focusing on natural-friendly materials and ingredients – similar to Whole Foods Market) rather than conventional stores' seafood section.*

*And, they prefer half-cooked products like canned, vacuum-packed or frozen. There are several unique vacuum-packed products like Acqua Pazza, Ajillo or Escabeche displayed at a seafood counter, which look very colorful and cool – very appealing for consumers. Another good thing is that these contain a lot of vegetables such as broccoli, green beans, onions and bell pepper.*

*I expect, adjusting change of cooking style for fish dish and consumer's consciousness, the half-cooked products used with MEL-certified fish and GAP-certified vegetable displayed on the shelf would help increase MEL's popularity. I also hope this movement will tell people distressed condition of marine resources which is must-to-fix, as well.*

*Written by Ms. Yuko Hirano*

## **POSTSCRIPT**

As Nagomoto-san addresses the topic, we would like to express our congratulations to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) on winning the Nobel Peace Prize 2020 as one of supporters for their activities. According to the survey conducted by the Consumer Affairs Agency, consumers' awareness for \*Ethical Consumption is increasing. We hope momentum of marine eco-label will increase being regarded as a response for the ethical consumption and vehicle of contribution in the post-COVID-19 society.

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

*\*Ethical Consumption means consumption behavior taking into consideration society and environment, and support buying products produced by the organization who address the resolution social issues.*

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