

November 30th, 2020

Marine Eco-Label Japan (MEL) Council

MEL NEWS VOL. 32 (ENGLISH EDITION)

Dear our partners:

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

1. MEL Certification Updates

There are three CoC certifications added so the total number of certifications is 75 (5 fishery, 30 aquaculture and 40 CoC) by the end of this month. Two processors, Gyoren Kashima Shokuhin Center and Maruhiro Tsuda Shoten, are co-packers for Hokkaido Chum Salmon. The supply chain of MEL-certified Chum Salmon has been linked with the processing phase finally. Hope this chain helps expand MEL-certified Hokkaido Chum Salmon's distribution and sales next year.

2. Events

Overview of MEL Mini-Workshop held on Sep 30 appeared in the Event Information of MEL website. This month, we participated in the following three events

1) 2020 Shiba Park SDGs Village

The event was held from October 31 to November 1, sponsored by SOUL FOOD JAPAN Co., Ltd. and backed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), and the Japan Fisheries Association (JFA). Since the visitors are the general public, from the perspective of appealing to consumers, in particular, we think that there is a certain positive effect because of many families with children. It was aired on TBS evening news show. And Mr. Takanori Maruyama, a Minato-ward congress member, introduced the event at his blog.



SDGs Village MEL Japan Booth

2) Toyosu Sustainable Symposium

On November 7, we participated in the symposium under the theme of "think about marine resources from Toyosu Market" sponsored by the Wholesales Cooperative of Tokyo Fish Market and Tokyo Marine Product Wholesale Association. Following the keynote speech by Professor Hiroyuki Matsuda of Yokohama National University and the business report from MEL Japan, the panel discussion was held under the theme of "new distribution model in the wholesale market using marine eco-label." The panelists consist of representatives of different industries: wholesalers, middle-sized wholesalers, producers (fishery and aquaculture) and retailers (supermarket and foodservice operator). This content was live-streamed on YouTube and Twitter, and we felt the attention was high, as viewers asked questions during the discussion.

In addition, MEL certified products were exhibited at the conference room and the total of 32 products from 15 MEL-certified producers were presented, which made the event very lively. In the second part, MEL CoC certificate awarding ceremony was held for three new entities: Tsukiji Uoichiba, Yamaharu and Tsukiji Ohta. In response, the certification was handed over by Mr. Takahashi, Chairman of the Japan Fisheries Resources Conservation Association (certification body) to the three representatives, who then expressed their strong commitment on MEL.



Toyosu Sustainable Symposium: upper) Panel Discussion, lower) MEL-Certified Products

3) Tokyo Sustainable Seafood Symposium 2020

Mr. Kakizoe participated in the session of "Regional Production and International Certification" on Nov 10 of the "Tokyo Sustainable Seafood Symposium 2020" sponsored by Seafood Legacy and Nikkei ESG, which was held online this year. Under the theme of "why domestic fishermen start to acquire certification." The representatives from MSC Japan, Usufuku Honten, Kaiko Bussan and MEL Japan Council attended and discussed the theme lively, facilitated by Makoto Suzuki of Japan fishery Certification Support. MEL Japan appealed that "MEL will work with everyone involved to realize a diverse and sustainable fishing industry and support the post-corona society."



TSSS 2020 Panel Discussion (center: Mr. Kakizoe)

3. Voice from Certified Entities

This month, we asked Mr. Tomomi Kimura, President and CEO of Kaneko Sangyo Co., Ltd., to write this message. Kaneko Sangyo was the first certified entity of farmed Bluefin Tuna (hatchery-raised seed). The Bluefin Tuna is expected to be Japan's leading farmed fish species in the global market. He talks about the current situation and issues.

"Marine Eco-Label Protects Japan's Rich Sea"

We obtained MEL aquaculture certification in 2019 and CoC certification in 2020 for Bluefin Tuna and Red Sea Bream. If we are asked whether the MEL certification is effective for actual business, we would say, "the answer is no, unfortunately." We received very favorable feedback from everyone regarding the MEL certification, but it was not reflected in the business such as conditions and prices except for some overseas business. In Europe and the United States, it is said that the presence or absence of MSC or ASC certification has a considerable effect on consumers' purchasing behavior. But, unfortunately, I cannot help but feel that the depth of understanding of marine eco-labels, including MEL, in Japan is extremely low.

On the other hand, I strongly feel that the environment surrounding the fishery and aquaculture industry in Japan has changed dramatically these days. Phenomena that are thought to be due

to climate variability, such as poor catch of Pacific Saury, Squid, and Chum Salmon, which used to be popular and abundant species, unprecedented occurrence of large-scale storm and flood damage, and abnormal rise in seawater temperature in summer, are major problems in front of us.



Kaneko Sangyo Takashima Hatchery facilities

Changes in the global environment are the major issue for us involved in the fishery and aquaculture industries. I think that the various items pointed out in the process of preparation for MEL certification will lead to the protection of Japan's rich sea, and, in turn, the continuation of our business. The international goal of the SDGs is not just another person's affairs, but as the company operating with the benefits of the sea, I would like to be strongly aware of No.14 of "protecting the benefits of the sea" and No.13 of "responding to climate variability."

Finally, we hope that the activities of Marine Eco-label Japan will move forward and expand step by step in order to protect the rich seas of Japan, a maritime nation, and we will work on activities to protect the rich seas as a participating certified entity.

Written by Mr. Tomomi Kimura

4. Column

We would like to introduce Mr. Hisashi Kurokura, Professor Emeritus of The University of Tokyo Graduate School, and a member of the MEL Standard Setting Committee. Kurokura-san talked about the essential meaning of the certification system.

"Benefit of Eco-Label Certification"

Since I was involved as a representative of agriculture in the early days (around year of 2000) of JABEE (Japan Accreditation Board for Engineering Education), I just overlapped MEL with JABEE. Certification is to meet some social need, but it is not always widely recognized by society in general. For better or for worse, Japanese are realist and not fundamentalist. Although they recognize the importance of preserving the environment and ecosystems, it is unlikely for them to become an environmental fundamentalist. There are few people who never buy the seafood



Mr. Hisashi Kurokura

products without the eco-label.

In Japan, which boasts advanced science and technology, scientists and engineers are generally respected, and the importance of qualitative assurance of science and technology education is recognized. However, there is little idea that a certain amount of compensation should be paid for their qualification. In both MEL and JABEE, the idea of improving society through economic motivation, in which the general public pays for the fulfillment of social needs, is originally small in Japan. That's a lot of good things, but it's hard to motivate financially, so everything tends to rely on legal

regulations and top-down controls. In such a society, some concrete motive must be created in order for MEL certified products and JABEE programs to be selected.

As a merit of obtaining certification, what JABEE prepared is the exemption from the first professional engineer exam. Those who have completed the JBEE certification program can become a training engineer without taking the first exam, register as an assistant professional engineer, and take the second exam after a certain amount of practical experience. This is a merit for students who receive education in the JBEE certification program. University side (education program provider) has a merit to be able to gather excellent students, as well.

However, this benefit did not work out so well. The number of programs that undergo JABEE certification exam steadily had increased for about 10 years since its inception. However, recently, there are few new certification programs added on. In addition, in order to continue JABEE certification, continued assessments are conducted every six years, but the number of schools that do not undergo is increasing. Although it depends on academic fields, the reality is that it is difficult to attract a large number of excellent students just by exempting the first screening of professional engineering exam system.

In this context, fisheries education programs are doing well. Originally, the number of faculty of fisheries is limited, so the absolute number of certification programs is small, but the number has been steadily increasing. There is no such privilege that only professional engineer in the fishery field can enjoy, and in fact, few people become the professional engineer in that field. Nevertheless, many fisheries programs seem to find significance in JBEE certification. Many JABEE programs related to fisheries are large-scale or on a department size basis. Larger systems are more difficult to manage. If the only purpose is to obtain certification, it is easier to make a small educational unit. In fact, many engineering JABEE programs are at best on a

faculty basis.

I think that the purpose of introducing JABEE in many fishery education programs was not the direct merit of exemption from the first exam of professional engineer, but the reform of the university centered on education. At universities or colleges featuring fisheries that have introduced JABEE program, the number of students is increasing, the deviation value (level of academic ability) is increasing, and I feel that excellent faculty members are gathering. If college or university reform is the goal, it seems that the goal has been achieved.

What is certification? Admitting that an object conforms to an established standard, but there are various certification subjects such as products, processes, and systems. A typical standard for product certification is JIS (Japanese Industrial Standards). For example, JIS stipulates that the length of toilet paper is 114m and the diameter is 120mm or less. While “process” certification means recognizing that the process in which a product is produced conforms to the standard, “system” certification means recognizing that a mechanism that constantly monitors the process and immediately improves it if there is a problem.

However, it is actually difficult to make a clear distinction between “process” and “system.” For instance, HACCP, an international food safety control standard, is essentially a critical control that is revealed as a result of analysis of hazards that threaten food safety. HACCP certification confirms higher-level process function that manages and records the process at a certain point, then quickly responds and improves when there is a problem occurred. I don't know if HACCP certification should be classified as “process” or “system” certification, but even with “process” certification, to ensure that the process meets the standards, through the PDCA cycle – make a plan (Plan), implement (Do), verify the result (Check), and execute necessary corrections (Action), it is required a higher-level process to record and manage the procedure, so even “process” certification may include some elements of “system” certification. Emphasizing the difference, “system” certification may be the requirement for the entire organization to share information and run management processes.

I was a judge for a fishery education program, and at a later date, I met the teachers who participated in the program and personally talked about what it happened at that time. I felt awkward because I made a slightly strict judgment, but I was told that it was grateful for the strict judgment. I could understand what he meant that strict judgment is more appreciated.

When I was a young new teacher, I was a member of the academic affairs committee. The committee manages the university's educational program, and the structure and content of the lectures. It is very hard to be a member of such committee when you are young. This is no longer the case now, but many university faculty members are unique, proud and confident in

their lectures, and do not want to be interfered with by others. In particular, it is difficult to ask a veteran teacher to change the content of the lecture. They do not share the problem.

Finding, sharing and improving problems throughout the organization is the key to success. If everyone understands a game plan as a team, including reserve players and support staff, this rugby team must be strong, for instance. However, in reality, it is difficult to share certain problems. System certification requires the entire organization to recognize and improve problems. It may have the secondary effect of improving the overall system. If the fisheries college or university introduced JABEE with such thought in advance, its eyes would be outstanding.

Currently, MEL is “process” certification, but it also has “system” element. In the MEL NEWS Vol.25, Professor Hiroyuki Matsuda reports that a GSSI official stated that ecolabels are constantly improving. I believe that MEL will gradually become “system” certification. In the first place, the fisheries industry, including processing and distribution sectors, is the industry that is established by highly sustainable use of natural ecosystems and environment. If so, I think it is possible to consider MEL certification as the strategy for improving and strengthening the organization centered on MEL activities which aims at conservation of ecosystem and environment.

Written by Mr. Hisashi Kurokura

POSTSCRIPT

The re-expansion of COVID-19, which started in Europe and US, has spread to Japan, and the highest number of infections are reported every day. We just hope that this will not lead to the collapse of industry and health care.

Finally, in the next few days, December will be the biggest business opportunity for fisheries related people. We hope that you will use your wisdom and actions to realize a Christmas and year-end sales season overcoming COVID-19.

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

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