

February 28th, 2021
Marine Eco-Label Japan (MEL) Council

MEL NEWS VOL. 35 (ENGLISH EDITION)

Dear Our Partners:

In the middle of the night of February 13th, there was an earthquake with a seismic intensity of over six with the epicenter off the coast of Fukushima Prefecture. It was local live news which reminds the violent shaking of the Great East Japan Earthquake ten years ago. It is said that the fisheries-related facilities in the Soma area of Fukushima Prefecture, which is close to the epicenter, have suffered considerable damage. We would like to express our deepest sympathies to all concerned. In addition, the bombogenesis in early spring chasing the earthquake also had various negative effects on people suffering from covid-19, and made us feel the ranges of nature.

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

1. Status of MEL Certification

This month's new certification was one for fishery, four for aquaculture, and one for CoC - the total of six cases. In the fishing industry, the Sea of Japan Crab Pots Fisheries Association gained the certification for the red snow crab fishery. It is the first time that the old MEL certification had been once expired, but the new MEL certification was applied and approved.

Although the Sea of Japan is being tossed by international politics, as the business of snow crab fishery is important not only for fisheries but also for processors, distributors and even tourism for Japan and local society, it is expected that the industry will be stably sustained and contributed to the local revitalization.



Red Snow Crab (*Chionoecetes japonicus* Rathbun)

2. MEL Online Seminar with Prefectural Governments

We held two online MEL seminar this month, though it was originally planned to held in Iwate Prefecture and Kagawa Prefecture. It was the first time for us to conduct the seminar online. Thanks to facilitation parties involved in the prefectures, it was a fruitful to receive active opinions. We would like to express our deep gratitude to everyone involved. At present, only one

organization for each Iwate and Kagawa (Taro-Cho Fisheries Coop's Wakame Seaweed Aquaculture and Hattori Suisan's Yellowtail and Amberjack Aquaculture) It is expected to help spread the momentum steadily in the two regions.

3. Voice from Certified Entities

We would like to introduce Mr. Goro Kudo, a leader of Jusan Fisheries Cooperative Association as a writer for the voice from certified entities. Jusan Fisheries Coop is the first case transferring from the “old MEL” to “new MEL.”

“Living with Shijimi Freshwater Clams”

The environment surrounding fishery continues to be harsh due to the aging of fishermen and decrease of catch due to changes in the environment. Meanwhile, various things have been suspended due to the influence of coronavirus, which is having a serious impact on the foodservice industry.

The quantity of Shijimi, Freshwater Clam landing, the mainstay of our Fishery Cooperative, decreased by about 260 tons from the previous year due to poor fishing in early spring. But, with regard to the value, the trading price stayed in high because of the increase in domestic demand caused by the stagnation of import. As a result, we were able to end in black this year.

Along with the convergence of covid-19, import demand will resume when logistics system normalizes and the unit price would be falling, so last we gained the new MEL certification to add value. I am looking forward to providing ingredients to the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic 2020 which has been postponed. However, unfortunately, I generally feel that the recognition of MEL certification is quite low. In the future, I would like to work on resource management of Freshwater Clams more than ever while promoting sustainable fisheries.



Left: Yamato Shijii Freshwater Cram, Center: Fishery in Best Season, Right: Mr. Goro

4. Column

This month, we asked Mr. Tsumemichi Aoki, the CEO and president of Technofer. The education institute is engaged in the center role of MEL auditor education and training program in order to enhance auditor's skill. He talks about the story of on-site assessment.

"Tension"

My name is Tsunemichi Aoki and I am the representative of Technofer Co., Ltd., a training institution. We are the company that has been training ISO 9001 auditors and internal auditors for a long time, and have been supporting the MEL Japan Council for about three years. As starting the ISO 9001 training course at the earliest stage in Japan, we not only provide training services, but also help new scheme launching. In the preparatory stage of application for GSSI recognition for new MEL scheme, we participated in the renewal of training content.



Mr. Tsunemichi Aoki

This time I would like to talk about the "tension" at the assessment site, not the content of training program we are conducting. If you are reading this newsletter, I think that some have already undergone the MEL assessment or been examined. Although it seems preaching to the choir, I hope that it would be a hint that leads to better management and improvement of audit work by returning to the beginning. As for the main subject, the tension in the assessment scene is not only for those who are audited, but also for those who are auditing. If the assessment is conducted with mutual tension in a good sense, it will be worthwhile for both parties to spend their precious time, including from the preparatory stage.

First of all, I would like to talk about "tension" for the side to be audited. Every human being is more or less nervous when experiencing the first time. For those who are undergoing the assessment for the first time, they would wonder how it proceed with, who conducts it basically and whether an auditor point severely or not? In some cases, people on site feel nervous, so do managers. "Tension" would ease a lot when it comes to the second and subsequent, but everyone would worry if the assessment is completed without problems this year.

In order to reduce that, it is a little too late on the actual assessment day, so we have no choice but to prepare firmly as much as we could think of by the day before. The assessment is just a place to judge whether it is based on the standard or not, so if you read the standard firmly and can answer with confidence whether it is conducted as the applicant's own initiative, nothing should be done on the day of the assessment, and do not be afraid. If you are so ready, you will

be much less nervous. Of course, it would be better to ask other companies who have already undergone the assessment about the situation. However, these are supplementary measures; the important thing is daily effort. I would like the management to be convinced that it is okay if they understand the standards and procedures and can carry out their daily work in line with them, and to guide the employees.

On the other hand, what is “tension” for the auditors? This is a little bit different from the perspective of organization people. If you are a lead-auditor who has some experience, it is unlikely that you become very nervous about the situation, applicant, etc., whether it is the first or subsequent surveillance audit. If you get tense up, the audit work would not proceed smoothly. Therefore, I would like to say that there is no tension for the auditors, but I would like you to be aware that there is one pitfall.

It is a risk of being as loose as a goose. To put it bluntly, I want the assessment to be a serious match between the lead-auditor and management of organization each time. I think the ideal assessment is the one that enhances the value of assessment in a serious match, and includes abundant stimuli that add value on the management even if it is not a point-out matter. This may be a classic example of “easy to say and difficult to do.” However, especially if it is a revisit as a surveillance audit for the applicant you audited last time, you would be able to feel how the management of certified entity changes from the previous time to this time and how it evolves and deepens. I would like you to use the on-site assessment as a place to give feedback to the counterpart after observing, feeling, and accepting it as a result of their steering for one year.

Different from the MEL assessment though, I undergo an assessment and attend a top interview every year. I would refrain from commenting on the content here, but at least I intend to be seated at the assessment site with the feelings mentioned above. This column has become quite long. Thank you for reading this, “Tension” at the on-site assessment. I am a little worried about how much everyone understood in my writing, but the space has run out.

If I have a chance, I will give you a supplementary explanation at any time. We are looking forward to seeing all people involved working hard while maintaining a good sense of “tension.” We look forward to your continued support when you meet us at the training site.

Written by Mr. Tsunemichi Aoki

POSTSCRIPT

Thank you, Goto-san for your comment. Please continue working on sustainable fishery for Shijimi Freshwater Cram conserving environment and ecology. We would expect Jusan Fishery Coop Association as the model of practitioner to protect the diversity of Japan’s fisheries.

Thank you, Aoki-san for your column. We recognize; the objective of training of ISO and MEL certification is same, and right work in line with the rule or standard will lead to secure the sustainability of ourselves and society and ensure the reliability of bridge between industry and community, yet there are some hardships or challenges up there.

We conduct store visit regularly. There is a movement where MEL certified entities actively are approaching retailers and doing promotion for the certified products in the seafood counter in order to response the increase of home meal demand. We highly hope this momentum will accelerate as retailer.

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

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