



MEL NEWS

Red Snow Crab
This month's
MEL certified
marine products



Marine Eco-Label Japan (MEL) Council

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Dear MEL Partners:

The UN Climate Change Conference (COP-26) held at the beginning of this month, with the persistent lead of the UK presidency, reached an agreement to resolve to pursue efforts to limit global warming to 1.5C over pre-industrial level, but the focus was only a phased reduction of coal-fired generation. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who participated in the COP-26 on a forced schedule despite the fact that it was immediately after the Lower House election, showed the world his determination to achieve zero carbon emissions and financial support for Asian countries. However, as demonstrations swirled around the venue and around the world, it was reported that environmental NGOs strongly distrusted Japan's continued use of coal-fired power generation. I would like to share with you that we are living in an age where not only the conservation of fish stocks, but all of humanity's actions are meaningless unless they are translated into results rather than words.

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

1. MOCA Completion

The GSSI Steering Board approved the continue recognition for MEL Japan on November 22. We are pleased to report to you that the long and arduous review process that began in December last year has finally been completed. This continued recognition is an acknowledgement that the management and operation of the scheme, which has been evolving day by day, aligns to the international standards. We would like to express our gratitude again for the efforts of everyone involved, and continue our efforts together with all of you in order to make MEL, which originated in Japan and recognized worldwide, even more reliable.

2. Status of MEL Certification

This month, one fishery and three CoC were certified, bringing the total number of certifications to 152 (12 fisheries, 50 aquaculture and 90 CoC). Certification of Japanese Oyster of Jigozen Fishery Cooperative, Hirohima is the first case of certified oyster species. Oyster is one of the

popular seafoods especially in winter gourmet scene. We are pleased to see the number of certified species has been increasing.

3. Voice from Certified Entities: “Our Approach to MEL Certification”

**Hideho Fukagawa, Representative Director and President of Kumamoto Prefectural
Seawater Aquaculture Fishery Cooperative Association**

The Amakusa Islands, the business base of our organization, are located in the southwestern part of Kumamoto Prefecture, surrounded by the Ariake Sea and Yatsushiro Sea, which are inland bays with one of the largest tidal ranges in Japan, and the Amakusa Sea, an open sea influenced by the Tsushima Current (warm current). Fishing has long been the core industry of the region. I used to be a fisherman leading a large and medium-sized purse seine fleet. In the bays of the Amakusa Islands, mainly in the Yatsushiro Sea, the stable sea conditions and relatively fast currents are utilized to farm about 14,450 thousands sea bream, 1,300 thousands yellowtail, 820 thousands tiger pufferfish, 1,990 thousands striped yellow jack, some flatfish, horse mackerels, grunt fish, striped breakfish, thread-sail filefish, marbled rockfish, black rockfish and etc.

Our organization is an industry-specific fishery cooperative consisting of fishermen engaged in aquaculture (40 regular members). In the hope of promoting local fisheries and regional development, the cooperative is engaged in a comprehensive range of businesses, including purchasing, sales, processing, and guidance, to provide a foundation for the livelihood of its members and local community, and to develop aquaculture as a key industry. With our specialized know-how in fish farming, we provide guidance to the members on feeding and rearing management for each fish cage, and implement integrated operation including processing and shipping. In addition, the cooperative and its members regularly conduct the inspection of water quality and r and bottom sediment in the fishing grounds, cleaning activities for conservation of environment such as marine drifted debris and seabed, and work together with the local government to build a red tide monitoring systemt. We believe that these efforts are in line with the SDGs and MEL's objective for those who are actively engaged in the sustainable use of fish stocks and conservation of environmental and ecosystem.

Our organization’s commitment to MEL certification begun in 2019, after its aquaculture certification standard launched. We have brushed up on this after working on the AEL certification in 2018 with the support of Kumamoto prefectural government. We asked three members to work together and develop aquaculture management procedures for yellowtail, sea bream, and striped yellow jack. By complying with these, we were able to obtain MEL certification. We are now in a position to roll out MEL certification to others when they want to do so.

At present, the eco-label is only used in pamphlets, and we are still in the process of developing

it. We believe that the MEL's concept is spreading to all parts of the supply chain, and we would like to sell our products attached with the eco-label. It will take some time, but we hope that our proactive management of fish stocks in consideration of sustainable use and conservation of environment and ecosystem will be properly evaluated and reflected in prices.



Mr. Hideho Fukagawa



Kumamoto's Logo Mark

4. Column: "MEL, Past and future"

**Nagiko Yasunari, CEO and President of
The Suisan Keizai Daily News**

In October 2021, two years before the MEL acquired GSSI certification, Mr. Kakizoe, president of MEL Japan Council, held a study session for general consumers titled "Why don't we think about the ocean and marine eco-label tonight?" He gave a detailed progress report on the MEL from its inception to current and future challenges. His slides and talks reminded me of the chaotic progress of Japan's fisheries industry over the past half century.

The starting point for a concept of marine eco-label was the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm, Sweden in 1972, which is the one of the major events that Japan's fisheries industry never forgets. A proposal to suspend commercial whaling for ten years was abruptly adopted at the conference. This was followed by the declaration of 200 nautical mile exclusive fishing zone by the United States and the Soviet Union in 1977 and the enactment of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1982 and so on, which had been progressed beneath the surface since then. The Stockholm Conference marked the beginning of the phenomenon that had upset the conventional common sense about the world's oceans. A new framework for managing the world's oceans was launched against the backdrop of the tension between "fisheries" and "environmental protection."

It is still unclear whether the "resolution to ban commercial whaling" that surfaced at Stockholm was - as has been said - an exchange deal between the U.S. government and environmental

groups (i.e., a ban on whaling for spraying defoliants during the Vietnam War). Since then, the U.S. government has incorporated the opinions of anti-whaling NGOs and environmental NGOs into its policies and has steered the country toward promoting an ocean policy without compromising the national interest. On the other hand, environmental NGOs in Europe and the North America, under the banner of protecting whales and other wildlife, staged large-scale protests and sparked a massive boycott of environmentally unfriendly "marine products."

Eco-labelling began as a mechanism to guarantee the commercialization of recycling resources in this environment, and in the case of marine products, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) debuted in 1997 with the support of Unilever, a major household goods manufacturer, and WWF (World Wildlife Fund). The MSC began to appeal to consumers as a certification system based on the FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (1995). The spread of eco-labels has been rapid, especially in Europe and the North America, and the number of similar labels has increased rapidly. As can be seen from the origins of the outbreak, the eco-label was based on the environmental protection movement in Europe and the United States, so the reaction of the fisheries industry was a bit of cool from the beginning, and it still retains that sentiment. Even in the United States, quite a few people have criticized the high cost of ecolabel certification and the complicated procedures.

In Japan, the Japanese version of the eco-label, MEL, was launched in 2007 under the auspices of the Japan Fisheries Association, which had felt turned off by the Western-led certification standards, but it failed to spread. As you all know, MEL got recognized by GSSI at the last minute at the end of 2019 through the cooperation of the government, public and private sectors in order to obtain the status of an official international certification before the Tokyo Olympics. Although MEL is a late entrant, it has certified 138 fisheries and aquaculture operators in 20 fish species. MEL is now rapidly gaining a presence as an indispensable tool for exporting seafood to Europe and the United States.



Suikei Daily News, June 12, 1972

Adoption of 10-Year Whale Moratorium at Stockholm Conference

In the past two years, the world has been at the mercy of the COVID-19 pandemic and is facing the issue of “global warming and decarbonization.” In fact, the greatest concern of those involved in the fisheries industry today are the elucidation of causes on “historically poor catch” that is believed to be brought by rising sea temperatures, and the enhancement of basic research to explore the future of fish stock fluctuations. I am hopeful that the time has come for the MEL Council members to use their diverse and abundant technology, information, and big-picture insights to rebuild a cross-disciplinary research system.

5. MEL Certification Award Ceremony

Two certification award ceremonies were held this month. On November 1, the Federation of Japan Tuna Fishery Cooperative Association for their pelagic tuna single-line fishery (11 fishing companies and 22 vessels). Another ceremony was held at the Tokyo Japan International Seafood Show on November 8. 10 certified entities (Nippon Suisan, Tsuji Suisan, Nichimo, Kaiko Bussan, Hiroshima Suisan, Miyagi Coop, Yokohama Food Service, Fukuichi Fishery, Yamatsu Suisan, and Jigozen Fishery Cooperative) received fishery, aquaculture, and CoC certification. We would like to extend our sincere congratulations to all the recipients of the certifications. We also hope that we can work together to revitalize Japan's fishery industry, which is suffering from a variety of factors.



MEL Certification Award Ceremony at Japan International Seafood Show, Tokyo Big Site on Nov 8, 2021

6. Standard Setting Committee

The Joint Standards Setting Committee for Fisheries, Aquaculture and CoC was held on November 15. As the number of certifications has increased over 150, there are some cases in which the standards in force are not sufficient to handle the increasing complexity of business in various assessment situations.

In addition to the current “95% Rule” for mixing certified and non-certified marine products, the Committee discussed the addition of detailed rules that would apply to the labeling of

“product combination” that use multiple fishery products, such as assorted sashimi or sushi platters and seafood bowls in a fresh seafood or deli counters, or even in restaurant scenes. In the case of corrective actions needed during a surveillance assessment for fishery, we requested that the time period for submission of information and evidence be extended from the current 60 days to one year in the case where a temporary suspension of certification is triggered due to a decline in fish stock conditions. The proposed time period is based on stock assessment published by a research institute like the Japan Fisheries Research Agency. The above two matters were approved by the Committee and will be discussed at the Board of Directors Meeting on November 30.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of cases in which producers who are members of certified entities, such as fishery cooperatives, sell their products directly to consumers or retailers. There are not so small voices where consumers want to buy the marine products directly from fishermen right after fish is landed. In light of this, only products under the category of production phase certification (e.g. scallops or oyster on the shell, etc.) can be labeled with the MEL logo mark on the premise that the certified entities or representatives fulfill their management responsibilities. This matter was approved by the Standards Committee, and will be reported to the Board of Directors, as well.

7. Tokyo International Seafood Show

We participated in the Japan International Seafood Show held at Tokyo Big Sight from November 8 to 10. This year, following the Osaka Seafood Show in March 2021, the organizer, the Japan Fisheries Association, kindly set up the "Seafood Ecolabel Certification Area", where MEL, ASMI (Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute) from the U.S., and domestic companies such as Yonkyu, Kaiko Bussan, Yamagin, Dainichi and Okamura Foods Industry. The MEL-certified entities, Azuma-Cho Fishery Cooperative Association, Kanoya Fishery Cooperative Association, Kumamoto Prefecture Seawater Fishery Cooperative Association, Ainan Fishery Cooperative Association, Tsuji Suisan, and Tokushima Uoichiba, exhibited enthusiastically at their own booths.

At the MEL booth, we introduced the activities of MEL and presented the 37 certified sample products provided by 17 certified entities at a fish counter section. From November 1 to the end of December, MEL temporarily partnered with Sanrio Co., to create an exhibit featuring the popular character "Cinnamoroll" in order to increase awareness of MEL among family segments. Cinnamoroll appeared at the venue, which attracted a huge crowd.

In addition, with the cooperation of Ito-Yokado, we created a fresh seafood counter or product display modeling its real seafood section. It helped retail visitors hold a visually clear image of the seafood section using a variety of MEL certified seafoods. We would like to express our gratitude to the fresh seafood team of Ito-Yokado for their cooperation and hope that it will lead to the expansion of their business.



EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT

Fukagawa-san, thank you very much. I remember his talking about the difficulty of aquaculture management at the MEL certification award ceremony on March 17, 2021 at the Osaka Seafood Show venue as if it would have happened yesterday. I look forward to your continued leadership and contributions to the development of aquaculture in Japan.

Thank you, Yasunari-san. The adoption of the ten years moratorium on commercial whaling at the U.N. Stockholm Conference in 1972 was an unforgettable shock for me – the editor was a member of the whaling operation at the time. However, I feel the mystery of destiny that this event triggered me to become involved in the management of MEL Japan. Yasunari-san, I would like to ask for your continued guidance on MEL Japan from a broad perspective.

While there was little positive news, the nation was excited by the achievements that Shohei Ohtani, the two-way player of Los Angeles Angels, won 2021 American League MVP, and Shota Fujii, the youngest Shogi player (Japanese Chess) to achieve the four-crown title. While impressed by their honest and humble attitude, I am amazed at the potential of their talented and growing youth. In order for Japan to show its presence in the world in the future, we have great expectations for young people.

The calendar is light snow, "Kitakaze Konoha o Harau (a cold winter wind drops the leave off the tree)" the 59th of the 72 division of the solar year. It is finally heading to the end of the year of the Ox, when many difficulties were encountered. I hope to get rid of the bad elements with a sense of tension.

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