



Marine Eco-Label Japan (MEL) Council

## **MEL NEWS VOL. 45 (ENGLISH EDITION)**

Dear MEL Partners:

*The Year of the Ox, when various events were concentrated and realized, was only a week away. For MEL, it was the year that we were able to evolve into a scheme with a certain presence both globally and domestically, having been supported by the understanding and cooperation of many people, during the five years of birth pains since we started as the new MEL Council. As action on the SDGs spreads throughout Japan, stock management and export expansion are becoming issues in the next Basic Plan for Fisheries under the new Fisheries Act, and expectations for MEL are rising. As we promised in the fifth anniversary letter, we will work diligently to address various issues with the aim of contributing to society and fisheries businesses.*

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

### **1. Status of MEL Certification**

*This month, there are a total of five certifications (one for fishery, one for aquaculture, and three for CoC), and total of 160 certifications are expected to be issued by the end of this year. We apologize for the inconvenience caused to the applicants due to the delay in the certification affected by the restriction of communication and travel caused by pandemic and the introduction of the peer review system.*

### **2. Voice from Certified Entities: “Respond Market’s Need leveraging MEL”**

***Kiyoshi Seto, President of Yokohama Shokuhin Service Co., Ltd.***

*In recent years, the world is undergoing major challenges, including climate change. I feel that initiatives to realize a sustainable society are essential for the future management of the company. In order to achieve this goal, we decided to operate the system in a visual way and recognized the importance of putting it into practice, which led us to obtain MEL certification as one of the SDGs initiatives.*

*One of the characteristics of our company is that we provide products that have a direct contact*

with consumers through mass retailers on a daily basis. Also, since we operate a restaurant, we can make direct conversations with consumers through seafood or food ingredients.

It is the time when people commonly talk about delicious, fresh, and traceability. The background for that, we should know that many people are working hard to create each product. Therefore, we recognize it is very important that in order to convey our thoughts of food safety and security to many consumers, we should make “What is MEL?” known to the people and actively disseminate information about conserving the sea and fish-eating culture, and participate in effort to realize a sustainable society.

If you want to eat fish, it is easy to decide something on a menu, but I think it would be possible to propose a new menu in a diversified diet. Thus, we are collaborating with students of faculty of International Commerce, Yokohama City University, and promoting MEL information dissemination, and conducting menu development and proposal using MEL products. We do not want to fix the information, but to transmit it as MEL information that can be widely popular. This is the first MEL certification for a restaurant in Japan. By all means, please stop by “Yokohamaya Honpo Shokudo Seafood Restaurant” and enjoy MEL certified seafoods!



Yokohama Honpo Shokudo Seafood Restaurant and Menu with MEL logomark

### 3. Column: “MEL’s Challenge of how to increase Public Awareness”

**Masayuki Takahashi, Chairman of Japan Fisheries Resources Conservation Association and Professor Emeritus at the Tokyo University and Kochi university**

A few years ago, a 23,000-year-old Paleolithic fishhook was found in the Sakitari cave ruins in Nanjo City, Okinawa Prefecture. It is the oldest in the world so far. In other words, humans had not used any tools to catch fish. At present, not only fishing, but also various tools for catching fish, such as nets, are being devised, and further efforts are being made to search for and collect fish, such as boats, fish finder, and fish reefs. In particular, the tremendous progress of the last

*100 years is extraordinary. It is no exaggeration to say that fishes have lost their hiding places and refuges in the world's oceans. If left as it is, the depletion of fishery stocks is concerned and, in fact, has become a reality for some species.*

*The problem is not just with fishery stocks, but it is with all the natural resources of the earth. It was taken up at the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, and then deliberated by the governments and the United Nations. With regard to fishery stocks, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) established international guidelines in 2005 with the aim of establishing a responsible fishery system to promote the sustainable use of fishery stocks, and a fishery certification system was established based on these guidelines. This system imposes certain regulations on fishing activities, but it also has a significant educational effect on fishermen.*



*Dr. Masavuki Takahashi*

*If we say fishery certification system, it would be difficult to handle everything in a unified manner because of historical background and the way of fishing which differs from country to country. For instance, in Europe and North America, fishing is focused on specific fish species, but in Japan, a variety of fish species enter the fixed nets, and this varies greatly depending on the season. The goal of achieving sustainable fishery remains the same, but the specific content and methods of assessment need to be devised. MEL was established as the system suitable for Japanese fishery.*

*In fisheries certification, there are a scheme owner that develops and maintains the contents of the standard system and a certification body that assesses the content of the standard system. For the former, Japan Fisheries Association and then Marine Eco-Label Japan Council since 2016, and for the latter, Japan Fisheries Resources Conservation Association have been in charge separately. Scheme owner and certification body are assessed by public authorities. MEL gained recognition from Global Seafood Sustainability Initiative (GSSI) in December 2019, and since then it has been recognized as the global marine eco-label certification.*

*It is gradually increasing, especially in the distribution processing stage certification (CoC certification), where consumer cooperatives and major retail companies have acquired certification. A major challenge is the lack of consumer interest in the certification. In Europe and North America, there is a high level of interest in sustainable fishing activities, and the selection of seafoods with fishery certification is widely seen in society. As a result, motivation to acquire certification is getting increase to have them chosen by consumers.*

*Unfortunately, in Japan, many consumers understand the need of sustainability, but this does not*

*translate into their purchasing behavior. Producers and distributors are burdened with the cost of acquiring and maintaining certification. They are forced to sell seafood at the same price as non-certified seafoods because they may not be able to add it onto price.*

*There is a perception that pesticide-free agricultural products may be good for the health of the buyers, and despite of expensiveness, these are purchased. But certified seafood products are not particularly beneficial to the buyers. It is not easy to overcome this challenge, which is similar to the fact that donation culture does not always take root in Japan. However, once social understanding and sympathy are created, there is Japanese national character of doing thorough implementation. I would like to work hard to realize it with all my wisdom.*

#### **4. Use of Social Network Service to Raise Awareness**

*It has been about five months since we opened Instagram account in July. The MEL account currently has about 350 followers, but the total number of “like” is about to exceed 12,000. Inviting influencers as MEL ambassadors, we have gained sympathy and are promoting MEL to the general public. We estimate that the number of “viewers” has exceeded 30,000 in about four months. In the last week of August, we newly recruited ambassadors, and, out of 47 applicants, selected 17 people based on their regular posts and questionnaires.*

- 1) Introduction of MEL – after deciding the member of ambassadors, we held a briefing on September 24 and lectured the main points of MEL’s concept and MEL Council.*
- 2) Dai Maru Yu SDGs Symposium – we Invited and asked them to report on the “Sus-Table” event at SDGs ACT 5 on October 4.*
- 3) Japan International Seafood Show in Tokyo – we had the ambassadors come to the exhibition either on November 8, 9 or 10 and asked them to report on the MEL presentation.*
- 4) MEL-Certified Seafood Tasting – the ambassadors posted the taste of Wakame seaweed from Taro-cho Fisheries Cooperative, scallops from Yamajin and yellowtail from Azuma-Cho Fisheries Cooperative.*
- 5) Announcement of Kids Event in Osaka – they posted announcement of Kids Seminar held at Osaka Science and Technology Museum in which parents and kids would participate on December 12.*
- 6) Yokohama Honpo Shokudo Seafood Restaurant – we asked the ambassadors to taste MEL-certified seafoods at the restaurant run by Yokohama Food Service.*

*With the cooperation of our ambassadors, we will continue to take various approaches to make MEL more popular to the people, so please follow us if you like!*

## Result of SNS Program

Events	# of Post	# of Like	# of Viewers
(1) MEL Introduction	18	4,300	12,000
(2) Dai Maru Yu SDGs	8	2,215	6,000
(3) Tokyo SFS	16	3,266	9,600
(4) Seafood Tasting	4 (ongoing)	1,069	3,000
(5) Osaka Seminar	3	485	1,455
(6) Yokohama restaurant	4 (ongoing)	582	1,740
		Total: 11,917	Total: 33,795



MEL Ambassadors' various posts on Instagram



### **EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT**

*Thank you, Seto-san, for your column. The other day the I visited the Yokohama Honpo Restaurant and tried a combo menu with the MEL logo. It was a moving moment definitely as the head of the scheme owner. Thank you very much, Dr. Takahashi. We will earnestly work together with certified companies to develop the social understanding you pointed out.*

*The Japanese fishing industry has had a dark year - historical poor catch of flying squid, pacific saury and chum salmon. On the other hands, this month WCPFC decided to increase the quota of bluefin tuna by 15%, which has appeased our frustration. In Alaska, next year's ban on king crabs in the Bering Sea will lead to 88% reduction in snow crab quotas and 20% reduction in pollock quotas. Although the quota of Pacific cod and black cod have increased, it had an incomprehensible impact on the fishery industry and caused a headache.*

*It does not seem to be a bright year of the Tiger or 2021, but please prepare for the coming year by cultivating your keenness. Thank you very much for joining MEL News this year. Wishing you a good year of 2022.*

*Marine Eco-Label Japan Council Secretariats*

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