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Marine Eco-Label Japan (MEL) Council

## **MEL NEWS VOL. 50 (ENGLISH EDITION)**

Dear MEL Partners:

*The Barcelona Seafood Show (the venue was moved from Brussels, Belgium to Barcelona, Spain), one of the world's three major international seafood shows, which was postponed for 2 years due to COVID-19 pandemic, was finally realized under the name of "Seafood EXPO Global 2022" this year, and I participated in it on a long trip. The number of exhibitors and participants from China and other Asian countries was rather small due to the coronavirus, but the scale of global demand for sustainable society and the expansion of fish consumption culture were astounding.*

*I came to a hypothesis that the global spread of fish cuisine was not due to the fact that Spain, which has traditional fish-eating culture such as Catalonia and Galicia, was the host country, but rather definitely, it was due to the evolution of seafood distribution management and cooking technology, in other words, "demand is expanding because seafood cuisine has become dramatically delicious and in variety."*

*I returned home keenly aware that sustainable utilization of resources and advancement of aquaculture industry are essential to meet the expanding demand for seafood products.*

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

*The number of certified entities this month was one for fishery, two for aquaculture and six for CoC; nine in total.*

*There are currently 42 audits under review (of*

*which 8 have completed the reviews and in the process of certification contract).*

*The certification process, which was delayed for a while, is picking up the pace.*

### **2. Voice from Certified Entities:**

***"The Path of Farming and Processing Management of Coho Salmon along with International Seafood Eco-Label Certification"***

***Shingo Suzuki, Executive Managing Director of Marukin Co., Ltd.***

*Our company's core business is the aquaculture and processing of coho salmon in*

*Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture.*

*In 1977, Kin-ichiro Suzuki, the current president, focused on the potential of coho salmon aquaculture, which was in the experimental stage at the time, and succeeded in commercializing coho salmon aquaculture for the first time in Japan, and kept the coherent system of farming, processing and sales as the advantage for more than 40 years.*

*In the Great East Japan Earthquake, all of our cages, ships and processing plants were washed away, but in the next year, 2012, we were able to rebuild and operate part of our fish farms and processing plants to continue*

*our business. In the process of restoring sales channels after the earthquake, we took on the challenge of exporting not only to the domestic market but also to Southeast Asia and other countries. In terms of the quality, we were able to earn good reputation, well-competitive to salmons of other countries. However, in some countries and regions, obtaining sustainable seafood ecolabel certifications, such as MSC and ASC, was a prerequisite for business, and we became strongly aware of the need for environmentally conscious aquaculture management.*



*↑ The beautiful body of coho salmon "GinOh" made by Marukin*

*Aiming to acquire seafood ecolabel certification, we launched the Aquaculture Improvement Program (AIP) in 2017 to review the existing aquaculture management system and reform sustainable awareness. The AIP compares conventional management with certification standards and visualizes*

*what improvements are needed. There were still few cases of certification in Japan, so we worked with stakeholders such as feed companies and seedling producers to make improvements one by one. Special emphasis was placed on fishing ground monitoring by IOT. By developing and installing a system that*

constantly measures water temperature, dissolved oxygen, and other factors, it is possible to reduce the human work load and to accumulate data on the state of feed consumption corresponding to the ocean conditions, which we believe will help improve the efficiency of aquaculture production in the future.

After obtaining MEL aquaculture certification in March 2020, we were able to obtain ASC aquaculture certification in June of the same year. By April 2022, each international certification had undergone 2 annual audits and is going to be renewed in 2023.

The number of inquiries for certified products has been increasing year by year partly due to the spread of SDGs. However, in response to the demand for ecolabels, production volume has been limited due to issues such as demarcated fishery rights, and we have not been able to fully meet the demand. We hope that the spread of Marine Eco Label will lead to the widespread understanding of the importance of environmentally conscious fishing not only among consumers but also among people involved in fisheries, and that it will lead to the resolution of various fishery management issues.

#### **4. Column:**

##### **“What to Expect from MEL”**

**Hideaki Yamaguchi, Former Director-General of Fisheries Agency**

The number of MEL certifications has been increasing recently. As of May 17 this year, there were 177 fishery, aquaculture, and distribution and processing (CoC) certifications approved by GSSI, an international standard. In particular, the growth over the past year has been remarkable, and I would like to pay tribute to the efforts of the MEL Council and everyone else involved.



**Hideaki Yamaguchi, Former Director-General of Fisheries Agency**

MEL certifies fishery and aquaculture producers who are actively engaged in sustainable use of fishery resources and conservation of environment and ecosystem, and companies that process and distribute seafood products from such producers.

As a result, fishermen who practice MEL will be able to clear through the new resource management measures introduced by the recent Revised Fisheries Act. When MEL-certified products are delivered from the production site to the table, it is expected that the efforts of fishermen will be communicated through market participants and retailers,

and eventually evaluated by consumers. Fishermen often say they expect MEL certification to increase the selling price of seafood. But things are not that simple. Consumers find value in a product when the price matches factors such as production method, location, quality, freshness, shape, deliciousness, and rarity. If producers are able to create products which consumers demand through MEL practices, consumers will buy them at higher prices fishermen want. Traditionally, Japanese people have been eating fish for a long time, so they could evaluate fish without teaching them, but today's consumers are different: mostly just buying filleted fish, while some are professional-graded and have the skills to cut whole fish. For this reason, large retailers are required to guarantee the contents of their products to consumers by selling products with the MEL logo. In addition, when exporting to foreign markets where the consumption of marine

products is increasing, fishery products are required to obtain HACCP certification and catch certifications including fishing zones and fishing methods. Future MEL standards need to be continuously revised to meet these domestic and international requirements in order for our seafood to gain the trust from the markets. With the enforcement of the Act on the Optimization of Seafood Distribution in December of this year, it is expected that digitalization of market transactions and digitalization of catch certificates and vouchers will advance. As the distribution structure changes, digitalization measures will be required for the distribution and processing certification of MEL also. There is no doubt that MEL will play an important role in many ways in this turbulent seafood industry. I believe there are many issues to be resolved, but I sincerely hope MEL will play a major role in the development of the fisheries industry.

## **5. Events**

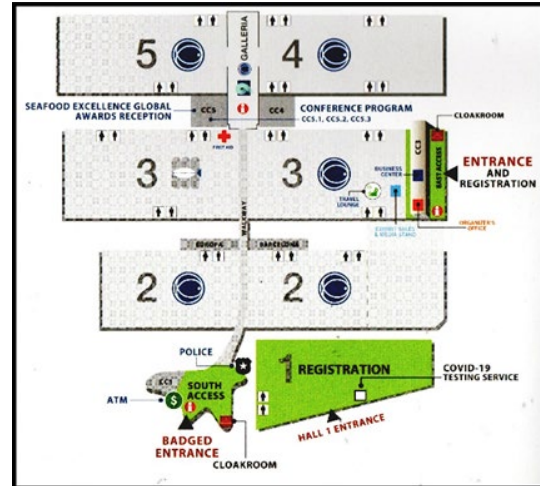
We participated in the Seafood Expo Global 2022 held in Barcelona. The exhibition was a large-scale event with a total of 3500 companies and organizations in the pavilions of 45 countries and regions in 6 halls, mainly from Europe and the United States, even though there were few exhibitors from Asian countries such as China. Among Japanese companies, JETRO, Maruha Nichiro Group, Nissui Group, and Kyokuyo Group had their booths led by overseas affiliated companies, and it was impressive that they showed great enthusiasm among Asian companies that had a relatively low presence.

As for favored products, yellowtail amberjack from Australia and Europe and yellowtail from Japan were attracting attention.

At the JETRO booth, MEL-certified entities such as Nanyo Bejoy, Azumacho Fisheries Cooperative (agent True-World Japan) and Daisui were exhibiting. MEL exposure is still low but it was featured in a side event at the venue. I felt it was an opportunity to increase our presence among the yellowtail and yellowtail amberjack in Europe.

In Europe, there is a growing movement to avoid meat from the perspective of ethical consumption, with some moving toward plant-based meat alternatives,

while seafood seems to be gaining steady support from the perspective of health. We will keep an eye on this movement.



**The Venue Guide Map of the Expo**



**JETRO booth, MEL-certified entities such as Nanyo Bejoy, Azumacho Fisheries Cooperative Association (in True-World Japan booth) and Daisui were exhibiting.**





*Japanese yellowtail displayed in the showcase of Spanish distributor.*

#### **6. Standard Development: Formulated Feed Standard & Fishmeal and Fish Oil Standard**

*The ordinary general meeting of Japan Fish Meal Association was held on May 19. Before the general meeting, the association organized a briefing session on the development of MEL certification standards for fish meal, fish oil and manufactured feed. The event was attended by representatives of the Processing and Distribution Division of the Fisheries Agency and the Japan Fisheries Oil Association.*

*The preparation of the certification standards drafts is progressing by*

*Professor Shuichi Sato of Fukui Prefectural University, and we are preparing to launch the standard committee, which is the next step, and to delve into discussions with you.*

*We recognize that the issue of fish feed is extremely important for Japan, now aiming to increase the production and export of carnivorous farmed fish. It is behind the original time schedule, but we will work hard with your cooperation.*

#### **EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT**

*Thank you, Suzuki san. I miss Onagawa, where I worked in my youth and where I have many memories. I was pleased to hear that you are raising the presence of coho salmon in the Sanriku Sea, instead of saury and skipjack in the past, despite the terrible earthquake. I wish you every success.*

*Mr. Yamaguchi, thank you for your precious story. Under the new Fisheries Act, for which Mr. Yamaguchi worked very hard, and together with the Act on the Optimization of*

*Seafood Distribution, we will manage to make MEL, the Japanese seafood eco-label, a top international brand. I look forward to your continued guidance.*

*This month's fish is ayu. As for ayu, Gujo Fisheries Cooperative Association and Mori Yogyojo have obtained MEL certification, and among them, Gujo Fisheries Cooperative Association will soon have its first season of certification for the "Decoy fishing". As MEL, the scheme owner, we hope this unique initiative involving recreational fishermen will be a successful season.*

*People in Tokyo have become more active since the end of the consecutive holidays. I see the line of people waiting for lunch same as before the Covid-19 pandemic, hoping this doesn't lead to another rise in infection cases. I wish you all the best of luck.*

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