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Marine Eco-Label Japan (MEL) Council

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Dear MEL Partners:

Although it is still May, it has been hot all over the country, you may feel the global warming effect from the hot temperature like summer day. I hope you will be active with full consideration for your health.

As you know, on May 4, WHO Director-General Tedros declared the end of the corona emergency. Also in Japan, from May 8, Corona was downgraded from Class 2 to Class 5 under the infection law. This is not the end of the pandemic, but we will enter a new stage in 3 years and 3 months from January 2020 and control the epidemic in parallel with other infectious diseases. In Tokyo, at the height of the tourist season, the once deserted Tsukiji Outer Market and Asakusa are bustling with inbound tourists.

As I mentioned before, I chew on the preamble of Infectious Diseases Act of 1991 pointed out that "Although many infectious diseases have been overcome due to advances in medical care and remarkable improvements in hygiene standards, infectious diseases still pose a threat to humanity in new forms as new infectious diseases emerge and known infectious diseases re-emerge, and as international exchanges develop." We will be left to make our own decisions on how to deal with the coronavirus, I feel it's important to be vigilant.

1. Status of MEL Certification

The number of new certified entities this month will be four for CoC. Overall, twenty two for fisheries, sixty one for aquaculture

and hundred thirty eight for CoC certifications, for a total of 221.

2. Voice from Certified Entities

Initiatives for salmon farming

Junichi Murakami

Executive Director, Kuji Fisheries Cooperative Association

Our union, located in Kuji City in northern Iwate prefecture, is mainly engaged in the business of selling, purchasing, ice making, freezing, processing, mutual aid and other businesses. All the union facilities were devastated by the tsunami damage caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011.

Since then, we have been working to restore our operations as soon as possible, and have been expanding our business since 2012. However, in recent years, the landing of the major landed fish species, such as Aki-sake (chum salmon) and Japanese flying squid, which is the basis of our sales business, has drastically decreased, and it was assumed that this would affect the management of the association. Therefore, in April 2019, in cooperation with Nichimo Mariculture Co., Ltd., a total support company for the aquaculture business under the initiative of the association, we started the trial farming of coho salmon. After 3 years of trial aquaculture, the full-scale aquaculture business started in April 2022 as our union business.

As we have developed our business, we

have discussed with the Nichimo Group how to proceed with environmentally friendly aquaculture activities, from the construction of aquaculture facilities in Kuji Bay to the arrival of young fish, feeding, and landing, as well as prompt processing and processing after landing. With regard to processing in particular, it was decided to entrust processing operations to Nichimo Corporation, whose processing and sales are handled by the union processing plant, with the idea that the union processing plant attached to the landing market should be utilized.

As for the acquisition of MEL certification, NICHIMO Co., Ltd., our subcontractor, obtained MEL certification in May 2021, and our union will be involved in the future aquaculture business.

MEL certification is a way to let consumers, including us, know that we are working to make our aquaculture business sustainable, "and for this reason, we believe that MEL certification is necessary, so we obtained MEL aquaculture certification and CoC certification in June 2022.



久慈市漁協様の「琥珀サーモン」フィーレ

The fillet of “KOHAKU salmon” of Kuji Fisheries Cooperative Association

We are working on MEL certification every day as a union, believing that it will develop into a certification that will be widely accepted overseas as

well as in Japan. Finally, we look forward to your continued guidance and encouragement.

Thank you, Murakami san. I read it with a heavy heart, remembering the miserable state of Kuji, which I visited immediately after the earthquake.

I am also pleased to hear that the project is moving forward in collaboration with Nichimo Mariculture, which is also MEL certified. I wish you all the best in your future endeavors.

3.Column

FAO and the Marine Eco Label

Ichiro Nomura

**International Advisor, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
(Former Director of Fisheries, FAO)**

*I joined the Food and Agriculture
Organization of the United Nations*

*(FAO) Fisheries Department (later
renamed the Aquaculture Department)*

in Rome in April 2000 on a secondment assignment from the Fisheries Agency and was with FAO for 10 years until July 2010.

From the 1990s to the 2000s, when I was a member, there was growing confidence and expectation of FAO member states and international public opinion in the work of the FAO Fisheries Department towards the development of norms for the



野村 一郎 様

Mr. Ichiro Nomura

Speaking of eco-labels for marine products, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), which had been active since 1997, was one of many other eco-labels emerging, and there were growing concerns that the criteria for each eco-label would be disjointed and confusing, or that arbitrary operation would lead to unfair regulation of the seafood trade. The FAO first set out to develop “Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fisheries

management of high seas fisheries. Among the top priorities for the FAO Fisheries Department are measures against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and the relationship between the CITES and fisheries, but in the first half of the 2000s, the issue of eco-labeling of marine products was also an important issue.

Products from Marine Capture Fisheries” to establish requirements and standards for marine products eco-labels for sea-level fisheries. At the time, however, some developing countries, such as Mexico and other countries in Latin America and India, considered the eco-label itself a barrier to seafood exports from developing countries, as they suffered from the U.S. ban on tuna imports stemming from the problem of dolphin bycatch in tuna seine fishing in the eastern tropical Pacific and the Dolphin Free Label, which only allowed products from fishing methods that did not kill dolphins to be distributed in the U.S. market. These countries opposed FAO's work to develop eco-label guidelines on the grounds that it would give credence to the eco-label itself, and so the process made no progress for several years. Among them, there was widespread recognition that an eco-label system certified with appropriate

requirements and standards would contribute to the preservation of related resources by giving consumers the choice to buy, and would also lead to increased exports of marine products from developing countries. As a result, the Guidelines were adopted by the 26 th FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in 2005, following technical intergovernmental meetings in 2004 and 2005. (Guidelines for eco-labeling of inland water fisheries were adopted at the 29 th COFI in 2011.)

Since I was a councilor of MSC from 2010 to 2016 after retiring from FAO, I would like to express my mixed feelings about MSC. MSC is a non-governmental organization (NGO) jointly established by Unilever, a major food company, and WWF, an environmental organization. It is also undeniable, but misunderstood, that the MSC was perceived as an organization that was biased toward pro-environment views and criticized the fishing industry, in part because of its founder's profile and the strong public criticism of unregulated high-seas fishing at the time. MSC became independent of Unilever and the WWF shortly after its founding and has maintained its fundamental position of providing consumers with the choice to purchase fish from sustainable fisheries using evidence-based standards. (That said, when I became a member of MSC's board of trustees, I

was ridiculed by trade press reporters who said "Nomura had also become a member of an environmental group".)

As you all know, the MSC's fisheries certification standards are based on three principles: (i) resource sustainability (the resource is not depleted and the fishery is not overfishing), (ii) ecological impacts (Fishing is carried out in a way that can maintain the ecosystem of the sea that serves as the fishing ground as well as its diversity, productivity and function. Consideration should also be given to preventing bycatch and protecting habitats), and (iii) management systems (appropriate fisheries management based on international and domestic regulations), scored scientifically and objectively on dozens of Performance Indicators belonging to each principle. If these principles and standards were met, it certified the tuna seine fishery associated with dolphins in the eastern tropical Pacific unabashedly in the face of backlash from radical environmental groups in the United States, and, conversely, it revoked the certification of the Northeast Atlantic mackerel fishery when it failed to agree on catch caps (TAC) and national quotas for the fishery, which touted its track record and success in resource management. It is this adherence to scientific and objective criteria that solidifies our confidence in the MSC.

I would also like to mention the association of the MSC with the work of FAO in developing the ecolabel guidelines. The formulation process begins with drafting by experts selected by FAO. There was no option for the FAO not to invite as expert officials from the MSC, which at the time was well known as an ecolabeling organization for marine products. In the course of the expert meeting, the MSC tried to incorporate into the draft guidelines the standards it considered desirable, and it would have been possible to revise the MSC standards to conform to the draft guidelines. During my tenure, I also received more than one visit from MSC officials to exchange views on the progress and prospects of the FAO's guideline development work. It was also useful for FAO to hear the practical expertise of MSC officials and to discuss with them the future market position of eco-labels for marine products. As such, the guidelines adopted by the FAO should have been very welcome to the MSC.

In my six years on the MSC Board of Trustees, only one case resulted in a verdict. It was a question of whether to make the ban on so-called "shark finning" a requirement for fisheries certification, which was a contentious issue at the 2013 council meeting. The results were adopted by a margin of

about three to one. Although this case has now been the subject of numerous tuna regional fisheries management commissions. In addition, the MSC at the time excluded human rights issues, such as forced labor of seafarers, included in the current MSC Fisheries Certification Standards, from consideration because the MSC did not have the expertise required to develop the standards.

So doesn't MSC have a problem? The answer is no. First of all, fisheries certification is expensive, at more than \$10,000 per case, and in some cases more than \$100,000 per case, making it unaffordable for fisheries in developing countries and even for small-scale fisheries in developed countries. There is also the problem that, because the standards are focused more on single-species fisheries in Europe and the United States, they are less likely to fit well with small-scale, multi-species fisheries in Asia and Africa. Although I have heard that MSC is considering and implementing a response to these criticisms.

As for MEL/JAPAN, I have no involvement in its establishment or activities and am neither qualified nor knowledgeable to make useful comments. We understand that it is problematic for the Japanese fishery to be involved in an eco-label system

originating in Europe and the United States that does not take into account the characteristics of the Japanese fishery, and that there was a recognition as a responsible fishing country that a unique eco-label for marine products that takes into account the characteristics of the Japanese fishery and can withstand international scrutiny was necessary. The background to the establishment of MEL and its subsequent development was thoroughly explained by Shigeyuki, former executive director of Japan Fisheries Association, in an April MEL news article. I am also told that the MEL standards were formulated in a way that is compatible with the characteristics of Japan's small-scale fisheries, which catch a large number of fish species, taking into account the criticism that has been heard against the MSC. It seems a natural and reasonable policy. In addition, after overcoming a great deal of work and difficulties, it can be said that the country has taken a giant step forward to be recognized by the world when it was approved by the GSSI in 2019 and achieved the status of an international standard scheme.

Thank you, Nomura san. I would like to thank you very much for the realistic story that only you can tell. As an editor in charge of MEL, I am humbled by the hard work of Mr. Nomura, who dug the well, and other predecessors involved. We look forward to your continued guidance and support.

I don't think it makes any particular sense to compare MEL and MSC, but here are the numbers: The MSC Fisheries Certification and the Chain of Custody (CoC) Certification in Japan received 16 and 352 cases, respectively (May issue of MSC Japan Newsletter), and MEL received 22 and 135 cases (heard by phone). MEL surpassed MSC in the number of fishery certifications, and it appears that Japanese fishermen are beginning to understand the benefits. With regard to CoC certification, Japanese trading companies and seafood companies have obtained CoC certification from MSC even before MEL activities began in earnest in order to gain access to Western markets, so it may be difficult in the short term to bring MEL recognition closer to that of MSC in international markets. However, prior to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, concerns arose that only seafood products that meet the requirements of internationally certified eco-labels might be eligible for procurement, but with MEL gaining GSSI approval, this concern is likely to be unfounded.

4. Report on Seafood Expo Global 2023

It was held, the second time in Barcelona, for 3 days from April 25 to 27 at the Convention Center. Compared to last year, the event was very successful with a venue area of 49000 square meters (+ 24%), 2100 exhibitors (+ 34%) and 33000 visitors (+ 24%). In particular, the booths of Chinese companies that did not exhibit last year stood out.

The number of Japanese participants increased from last year, and JETRO's Japan Pavilion was crowded with 15 companies including Nanyo Bee Joy, MEL certified company, and JAPAN

FARMED FISH EXPORT ASSOCIATION, also attended to Seafood Expo North America on March, offering samples of yellowtail and red sea bream. Among Japanese companies, Maruha Nichiro, Nissui, a local company of Kyokuyo, and Celmac (Mitsubishi Corporation), set up large booths in well-located Hall 2, it was crowded with many people. I took it that the Japanese seafood industry, which had been domestic for many years, has now shown its presence to the world. I am expecting great things on it, we hope we will do our best to help.



5. Conference on CoC Mutual Recognition with CSC

We had a meeting with CSC, the scheme owner of RFM, about for CoC mutual certification in Barcelona on April 27. We explained our CoC standard, related regulations, and review system, and exchanged views on identifying differences from RFM, sorting out the scope of coverage, and dealing with certification bodies. Although both schemes are almost similar because they

conform to ISO standards, we found some differences and decided to have a mechanism for mutual recognition and approval. In the future, we plan to further scrutinize and organize standards and regulations, hold briefings with certification bodies, and complete preparations for clerical work by the end of the year.

EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT

A lot of general meetings of companies and organizations is held day after day. In spite of the double whammy of poor fishing and poor demand caused by the pandemic, the fisheries industry has been reporting satisfactory financial results to us. I would like to pay tribute not only to the benefits of rising fish prices, but also to your daily meticulous improvements and the results of reforms.

Two months have already passed since the start of the new fiscal year, and many people seem to think that this year will be anything but easy. We hope that we will preserve the vitality of Japanese fishing industry together with you.

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