



Aug 31th 2023

Marine Eco-Label Japan (MEL) Council

MEL NEWS VOL. 65 (ENGLISH EDITION)

Dear MEL Partners:

While the fishing community, especially the local community, was not satisfied, the release of treated water finally began. We can only hope that this does not mark the beginning of a more difficult than anticipated period that will continue for decades to come.

As you are aware, on August 3, the EU abandoned import restrictions on Japanese food products that had been in place since the Fukushima accident. Meanwhile, the bad news is that China has imposed a total ban on imports of seafood from Japan in connection with the release of treated water. China and Hong Kong are the largest destinations for Japanese seafood, so if they continue for a long time, they will inevitably be severely damaged. MEL do not set standards for radioactivity, but there are days when it is difficult to figure out how to respond to the complicated bargain of international politics.

1. Status of MEL Certification

The number of new certified entities this month will be two for aquaculture and two for CoC. Recently, due to the renewal period of certification, there have been cases where certification has been terminated. The total number of certifications completed is eight, which is not a small number. The reasons for termination vary from a problem with the

level of resources to an inability to feel the effects of obtaining certification, but we believe this trend will continue. We have a policy that we will not hold back as a MEL Council, but we will proceed with details so as not to disappoint those who have been certified.

2. Japan International Seafood Show 2023

We exhibited at the Japan International Seafood Show, the first full version in four years. The scale of the event has recovered to more than 90% of pre-

pandemic levels, with exhibitors from 16 countries and regions, and 600 companies and organizations from Japan. In addition to displaying fish and

processed products, the exhibition showcased the latest technology. Continuing from last year, the "Marine Eco-Label Corner" was established as one of the main attractions of Japanese Fisheries Association, which is the organizer of the event, and MEL reported on the current status of its products and displayed 35 products by certified entities. At the exhibition, overseas schemes of MSC, GSA (BAP) and ASMI

(CSC) were exhibited, and four MEL certified companies (Takahashi Shoten, Minami Foods, Yamashita Suisan, Yonkyu) were aggressively promoted through tasting and product displays. The exhibition was crowded with people from the retail and food service industries and many other related parties, showing the time when the marine eco-label is being implemented in society in Japan.



水産エコラベルコーナーと MELのブース
Marine Eco-label corner and MEL booth

3.MEL Workshop 2023

On August 23, the first day of the Japan International Seafood Show, MEL Workshop 2023 was held in the conference building of Tokyo Big Sight. Although the event was hosted by Japan Fisheries Association and managed by MEL, the speakers included Miwako Takase, former Deputy Director of the Resource Management Department (currently a member of JFA) from the

Fisheries Agency, Lisa Goché, the new Executive Director of the GSSI, and other leaders of the society (Mr. Kikuchi, Hokkaido Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations, Mr. Yuyama, Ito-Yokado) who are closely related to the Eco-Label, and based on the questions asked in advance and the opinions of the audience, the discussion turned to a nice discussion on the new era of the Marine

Eco-Label. As the host MEL Council, it was a heated meeting where each speaker responded to everyone's sincere suggestions with a fastball, and I took this as the significance of holding the workshop. Through an exchange of views with Secretary General Goché, I also felt that the impact of Japanese new fishing laws and legality had on other countries was significant, and that there was a need to involve more stakeholders in information dissemination overseas and to convey a clear message.

Dr. Masashi Maita, Vice President of

Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology, who chaired the panel discussion, gave his closing remarks.

- 1) Seafood eco-labels are an essential mechanism for industry to survive*
- 2) Seafood eco-labels will be a driving force for a sustainable society in the desired direction*
- 3) I want you to keep evolving for that.*

This workshop has been archived (in Japanese and English) so that it can be shared with those who could not attend.



大日本水産会 内海専務による開会のご挨拶

Opening address from Director Utsumi of Japan Fisheries Association

4.Voice from Certified Entities

This month, we spoke with Soichi Yoshimoto, president of Tokushima Uoichiba Co., Ltd. Developed from its founding business of wholesale markets, it has been widely active as a general fishery trading company covering the entire supply chain from aquaculture to processing and distribution. It was displayed their products of Tokushima Uoichiba Co., Ltd. and Asahi Bussan Co., Ltd. at the booth of Tokushima Prefecture in Japan International Seafood Show.

"Toward a Connected Future with MEL Certification"

Soichi Motono,

President and Chief Executive Officer of Tokushima Uoichiba Co., Ltd.

Our company is a seafood wholesaler called "Niuke" at the central wholesale market in the city of Tokushima. 50 years after the market opened, along with the trend of the times, our company has quit from selling fish brought in by fishermen to wholesalers through auctions, we change to manage the market with a broad view to connect the thoughts of fishermen with those of consumers. It is also the market's mission to provide safe and secure seafood along with a stable supply of seafood.



徳島魚市場 吉本 創一社長

Our company has achieved MEL distribution and processing stage (CoC) certification, as well as aquaculture certification for the Uoichiba Co., Ltd., Group, as demand for and attention to farmed fish increases with global demand for seafood. It fits with our company's long-standing commitment to protecting the natural environment for seafood.

This initiative can be achieved not only by the awareness of producers and distributors, but also by the fact that it is communicated to consumers, shared, and empathized, leading to consumption. Therefore, the challenge was that the system is designed that all the people who involved the supply chain from production to retail was certified, if it were not, the initiative would not reach consumers.

However, thanks to the efforts of the members of the MEL Council, we have recently started to receive calls from retail customers who have sympathized with this initiative and want to handle MEL-certified fish as they would like to obtain it themselves. I think it's a great pleasure for our company and a great encouragement for producers. The number of such people will increase, and the MEL

certification will be recognized by the general public, which will lead to consumer awareness, which will be reflected in the consciousness of

producers and distributors, which will lead to the protection of Japan's natural environment and resources.



徳島魚市様の「すだちぶり」のポスター
Poster of "Sudachi Yellowtail" of Tokushima Uoichiba Co., Ltd.

First of all, we will strive to further develop our aim as Tokushima Central Wholesale Market which is a distribution center for marine products

based on philosophy of MEL.
-In August, our company was recognized as a "Partner of the

Tokushima SDGs" promoted by Tokushima Prefecture. As a priority initiative on the SDGs, we have set a target in the environmental field: compliance with the provisions of the MEL certification system. -

In the future, the awareness of MEL certification among the general public will lead to the establishment of rules to protect precious marine resources. And naturally, I think the Japanese fishing industry will be recognized to the world.

Thank you, Yoshimoto san. We would like to express our gratitude for the commitment of MEL to compliance in the activities of the "Tokushima SDGs Partner." In addition, we are pleased to see that Sudachi yellowtail, which we are focusing on, has increased its presence. I will do my best to make MEL even more helpful.

5.Column

Importance of Regional Aquatic Environment Certification System

Masaaki Sano
Professor of Kagoshima University

(1)"GAP" Certification and Regional Tierability in Agriculture and Livestock Industry



鹿児島大学 佐野 雅昭教授

Masaaki Sano, Professor of Kagoshima University

At present, it is progressing the introduction of "environmental certification system" in various product categories in the world. Examples in the forestry sector, such as FSC (forest

management, paper products, etc.) and RSPO (palm oil products), are leading the way, and the frog-marked Rainforest Alliance, aimed at protecting the rainforest, is probably familiar to any coffee lover. In the

modern market, in addition to the value of meeting individual consumption needs, attention is beginning to be paid to the value of meeting the social needs of "eco-friendliness."

However, the "environmental certification system" in the agricultural and livestock industry has not spread unexpectedly. Rather, in the field of agriculture and livestock, efforts are being made to achieve "GAP certification." "GAP" stands for Good Agricultural Practice and means "good farming practices." the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries also calls it "agricultural production process management," and it is a system that certifies business entities that meet certain standards in seven areas:

- (1) ensuring food safety,*
- (2) ensuring worker safety,*
- (3) ensuring livestock hygiene,*
- (4) consideration for animal welfare,*
- (5) human rights and welfare of workers,*
- (6) ensuring environmental protection,*
- and*
- (7) trusted farm management.*

A third-party organization objectively reviews farms and JA and other producer organizations, and if they are found to be above the standard, they are given certification. It is not primarily concerned with the presence or absence of "environmental

consideration," but can be said to be a system to comprehensively solve or improve various problems in the agriculture and livestock industry and to ensure sustainable management of the industry.

This system is structured as one system with the global "GLOBALGAP" at the top, with four levels of regional hierarchy, such as "ASIAGAP" effective in the Asian region, "JGAP" limited in Japan, and "prefecture GAP" in each prefecture. In general, the more local the certification, the looser the standards, and a certification above "ASIAGAP" means that the product meets the "GFSI (World Food Initiative: an organization led by the world's leading food companies that approves food safety standards for consumers)" standard, which allows it to meet the procurement standards of major international retailers. Many of the world's largest food retailers and food companies are making GFSI certification a condition of their business, and products with "ASIAGAP" or higher rating will have an advantage in the global market. Producer groups are encouraged to work on this, and there is a system in place that is expected to move the upper levels between the layers within the system.

(2) Significance of Regional Aquatic Environment Certification System

A somewhat different picture can be seen in the fisheries industry than in the agriculture and livestock industry. The most popular systems at the moment are "MSC certification" for natural marine products and "ASC certification" for farmed marine products. The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) was established in 1997 by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Unilever (UK), one of the world's largest agribusiness companies. MSC has steadily increased its certified fisheries, and in March 2022 the number of certified fisheries was estimated to be 539 worldwide, with a total catch of about 20 million tons, making it the world's largest marine environmental certification system. There is no meticulous consideration for regional fisheries, and the principle that every fishery in the world should be managed uniformly and rationally with uniform standards is maintained. It is the thoroughness of globalization in environmental considerations.

However, the number of certified fisheries in Japan is still small, with only 14 such as the skipjack tuna fishery and scallop fishery as of the end of fiscal 2022. Why? The MSC is a system that originated in Europe and is designed with in mind the simple large-scale corporate fishery that is the mainstay in Europe. The acquisition cost is also quite high because the

system is designed for corporate fishing. Moreover, its screening criteria are not suitable for Japanese fisheries, which are complex and flexible with regional and seasonal variations, and do not have the ability to evaluate the detailed Japanese style of voluntary resource management that has developed harmoniously with such an environment.

But, many of coastal fishery products in Japan are actually fished under strict resource management regulations, and many are given due consideration to environmental sustainability. The lack of MSC certification is by no means disorderly, but rather good. Therefore, MEL (Marine Ecolabel Japan Council) was launched as a marine environment certification system adapted to the complex resource structure and fishery production system unique to Japan. Accurate certification standards were established to suit Japanese coastal fisheries, and the cost of obtaining certification was kept low. It was also approved by the GSSI at the end of 2019, and Japanese first marine environment certification system was recognized worldwide. Aquaculture products are now also covered, and as of August 2023, about 86 fisheries, including aquaculture, have been certified (including 23 certified fisheries). Such regional "G.U.L.F." exist

in other countries, including RFM in Alaska, IRF in Iceland, in the United States, and CQA in Ireland, and are all certified by GSSI. The owners of these schemes are non-profit third-party organizations, and the system is less burdensome for producers and consumers. For now, these systems are limited to the seafood products of the local fisheries on which they depend, and have the advantage of strict origin labeling and traceability, as well as a detailed screening system that can scoop up the honest efforts of artisanal fishermen. Its strength will be its ability to evaluate a more effective, less formal management system at a lower cost.

These local and global certification systems do not have the hierarchical structure found in GAP, but exist independently of each other. Fisheries,

(3) THE END

Japanese marine environment and fishery resources are rich in diversity, and the fisheries that catch them are also complex, flexible and diverse. It does not need a fisheries environment certification system that cannot evaluate Japanese coastal fisheries and their environmental compatibility, which adapts to the naturally varied nature of Japan's natural environment and changes its shape on a case-by-case basis. Consumers should not be swayed by superficial fads and news

especially coastal fisheries, exist with the local environment and are constantly changing and highly diverse. Attempting to uniformly assess the environmental performance of the world's fisheries using uniform and rigid standards is actually unscientific and an attitude that does not understand the symbiosis with diverse "environments." It is more scientific and effective for local fisheries around the world to assess environmental performance with schemes that are unique to each region. They are therefore not in competition. Rather, they are segregated according to the characteristics of the target fishery. In view of the inherent industrial characteristics of fisheries, it is indisputable that the local ones are more important.

reports and instead be confident in Japanese coastal fisheries and the environmental certification system that originated in Japan. Eating uncertified domestic fish may contribute more to environmental sustainability than certified imported fish. I hope that Japanese consumers will understand that the right attitude is to raise profile of MEL in the domestic market and at the same time selectively consume domestic seafood rather than imported fish.

Dr. Sano, thank you very much for your valuable suggestions. MEL is currently on the verge of approval of a new sub-standard (Global Benchmark Tool Ver. 2.0) of the GSSI, and if approved, will be the second GSSI new standard approval scheme in the world. I believe that the time has come for MEL from Japan to finally be recognized by the world because of the diversity and environmental harmony that Dr. Sano has pointed out. In the future, we will continue to take actions to contribute to the sustainability of the natural environment and resources as well as industry through proper information dissemination with the people involved. Thank you for your continued guidance.

6.MEL Family Event

We started MEL summer school for parents and children last year, and we held three classes this year. It was vibrant in the venue of the meeting room of Japan Fisheries Association. The event was well received by a total of 46 participants (Parents 20, Children 26) and 1 family participating online.

The children took part in fish quizzes and crafts (this year we made a mini aquarium using glass bottles), and parents took part in a simple MEL study session. It was in a very hot weather, but I think the children (mostly in the lower grades of elementary school) were very active and enjoyed it.



各回参加のお子様との記念写真と工作への取り組み風景

Commemorative photo of participants and craft making

.....

EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT

The issue of China's total ban on Japanese seafood, triggered by the release of treated water from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant at the beginning of this article, reminded me, the former president of The Association for the Safety of Imported Food, Japan(ASIF) Safety, of my harsh experiences with food safety and security.

While the poisoning of dairy products caused by Staphylococcus aureus, which occurred mainly in the Kinki region in 2000, shook society, a mad cow disease outbreak in Japan

in 2001 and the residual problem of chlorpyrifos, an organophosphate insecticide in frozen vegetables from China, combined to ignite the issue of food safety and security. As a result of the globalization of food, the risks created by imports and exports became apparent, and the government enacted the Food Safety Basic Law, compiled the Policy Outline for Food Safety and Security, and introduced the "Positive List System for Pesticide Residues, etc."

Chinese products were the most affected, and it is indelible in memory that the frozen dumpling incident in 2008 culminated in consumers' rejection of Chinese products. Furthermore, the radioactive contamination caused by the nuclear power plant accident caused by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake shook the world, and we witnessed firsthand the reality that the issue of food safety and security can be a victim at one time but a perpetrator at another time.

In a mixture of dreary anxieties, unfounded theories, and entrenched memories, media coverage promotes abnormal psychology in society. I wrote of my feelings at the time in a contribution to a magazine, "Food safety and security, like resource protection, is a long and endless journey." I am reminded once again that how we walk this "long journey" is a source of trust for individual companies and organizations, for the industry as a whole, and for the nation.

We had the International Seafood Show this month and we apologize for the delay in getting it out to you. The heat wave shows no signs of abating.

I wish you all the best for your summer fatigue.

Marine Eco-Label Japan Council Secretariats

Nittochi Uchisaiwaicho Bldg. 3F, 1-2-1 Uchisaiwaicho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0011 Japan

URL: <https://melj.jp/eng/> Email: info@melj.jp