

MEL Workshop 2023
(held at Japan International Seafood Show)

Towards the New Age of Seafood Eco-Labels

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Marine Eco-Label Japan Council

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MEL is in the final stages of recognition process of GSSI's new standard (Global Benchmark Tool Ver. 2.0), and is expected to successfully complete the process in the very near future.

If recognized, MEL will be the second GSSI-recognized scheme along with ASC for the new standard worldwide, following the CSC (Alaska) RFM in July.

< MEL's Mission >

With slogans like “Connect the sea, fish, and seafood culture to the future” and “Bring the diverse gifts from the seas around Japan to the world,” we are promoting sustainable fisheries. Through the development of Japan's fisheries and inheritance of seafood culture, we contribute to SDGs such as “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources,” and “Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.”

MEL Council was established as the scheme owner of MEL, and we are working to become as social infrastructure to conserve marine ecosystems and resources in line with international standards. Our aim is to meet the demands of the society as a “world-recognized seafood eco-label originating in Japan”, reflecting Japan's diverse nature, industry and food culture.

MEL is a certification system that reflects the realities of Japanese seafood industry and society.

MEL's work toward international standardization

Japan is a country blessed with diversity, bearing one of the world's largest EEZ and an extensive coastline. However, this diversity can be negatively perceived as a source of fragmentation.

MEL aims to establish a “world-recognized seafood eco-label originating in Japan” by taking advantage of Japan's geographical, biological, industrial and food-cultural diversity.

What MEL can do = Promote the diversity and its utilization with all those involved, and communicate it to the world.

The New Age of Seafood Eco-Labels

As expectations for ecolabel's contribution to society grow, so does the scrutiny of the certification system. This is reflected in the work of SO (scheme owner), CB (certification body) and AB (accreditation body).

- ◆ GSSI's new standard (Global Benchmark Tool Ver. 2.0) took effect in November, 2021.
- ◆ MSC's new fisheries standard (Ver. 3.0) was made public in October 2022, and took effect in May 2023.
- ◆ ASC's aquaculture standard revision (Ver. 1.4) (tightening the parasite management for the salmon standard) took effect in February 2023. In May 2023, the CoC certification was revised, adding food safety requirements (GFSI certification and ISO 22000 certification).
- ◆ MEL's aquaculture standard was revised (Ver. 2.0) and took effect in August 2022, to align with the new GSSI Benchmark Tool.

Clearly, changes in certification standards around the world are moving toward tightening.

MEL has also implemented measures such as not certifying fish stocks with resource levels below the B-limit in fisheries certification, banning the use of moist pellets in aquaculture certification, and introducing a peer review system for audit reports.

While the standards are being tightened, there is also a growing movement to ease the "ban on conspecific feeding" clause in aquaculture feed.

Are stricter eco-label certification standards compatible with industrial sustainability? Contribution to humanity is possible only with industrial activities.

1. “Can we protect humanity’s tomorrow, if we cannot protect the sea?”

Without the **ecosystem services** provided by the sea, even the current global environment cannot be sustained.

What is Ecosystem Services?

Provisioning services
Regulating services
Cultural services

+ Supporting service

The term “**ecosystem services**” was first publicly used in the United Nations’ “Millennium Ecosystem Assessment,” released in 2005. Among the ecosystem services provided by the Earth, 64% are contributed by the oceans, including climate regulation and CO₂ absorption. For instance, the annual global CO₂ emissions from human activities amount to 8.9 billion tons (in terms of carbon). Out of this, natural processes absorb 4.9 billion tons, with the oceans absorbing 2.3 billion tons.

2. The sea, seafood industry, and seafood

In Japan, the "5th Basic Plan for Fisheries" was formulated in 2022, initiating various measures aimed at promoting the fisheries sector into the growing industry.

Globally, under the umbrella of the "Blue Economy," a significant movement has emerged, aligning with the 14th goal of the SDGs, "Life Below Water," to develop the economy and society sustainably by safeguarding and responsibly utilizing the seas.

The economic value of the Blue Economy is projected to reach 3 trillion dollars by 2030 (OECD). More importantly, the "ecosystem services" provided by the oceans ensure the future of humanity. **Through our businesses, we are called to contribute to the maintenance, improvement, and enhancement of these ecosystem services.**

3. Political and Administrative Initiatives

Transforming Japan's Fisheries into a Growth Industry

New (Revised) Fisheries Act: Enacted on December 1, 2020

Managing resources in detail and building a competitive industrial structure.

Act on Proper Distribution of Fisheries Products: Enacted on December 1, 2022

A mechanism to prevent the distribution of illegally captured seafood, both domestic and imported. Although the mechanism will increase the burden on operators, it is unavoidable for the sake of credible and sustainable seafood.

The New Basic Plan for Fisheries: Approved by the Cabinet in March 2022

Innovation is desired in the industry for promotion of sustainability.

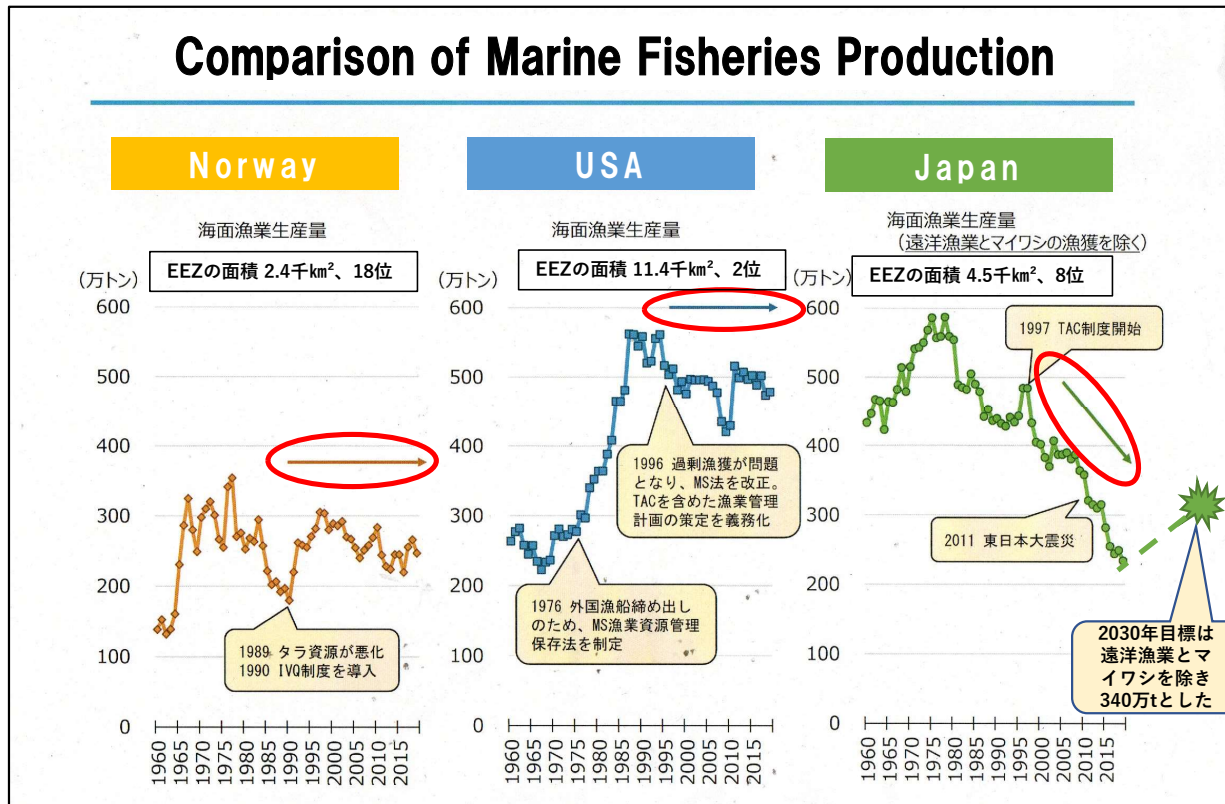
- Steadily implement resource management in response to environment changes
- Catch Quotas will be allocated individually (IQ)
- Realize the transformation of Japan's fisheries into a growing industry
- Revitalize fishing villages which is the foundation of local communities and livelihoods

4. Seafood industry is growth sector in the world, declining in Japan

Norway focuses on fisheries as a successor to North Sea oil, which will eventually dry up. Norway leads the world not only in fishing but also in salmon and trout farming. Still, the country is raising resource taxes on aquaculture operators.

America has managed the Bering Sea fish stocks successfully, but crab stocks face tough times.

Japan has succeeded in resource management for some fish species, but restoration of coastal ecosystems and resource levels is essential.

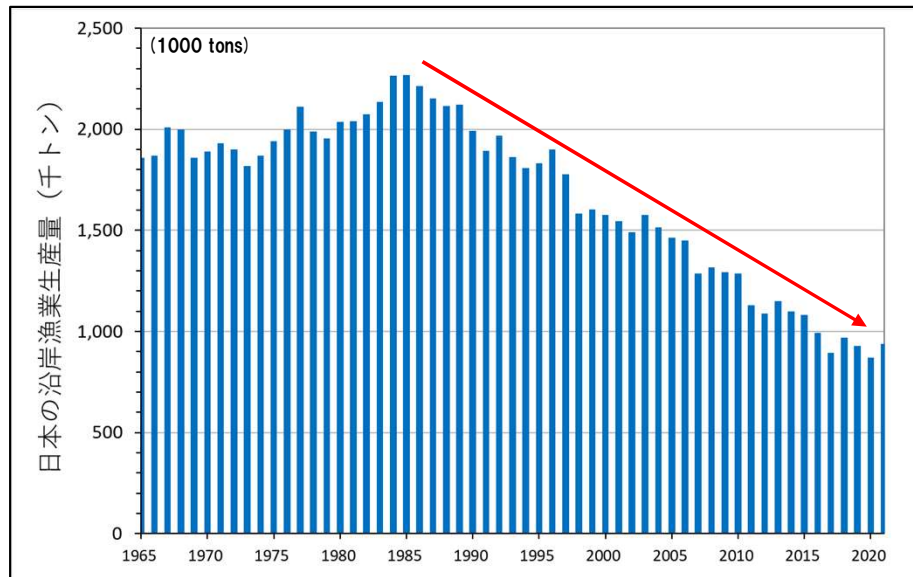


水産庁加工流通課資料に筆者が加筆

The difficulty of facing living creatures and nature.
Direction of industrial policy

5. Japan's fisheries industry must restore the nature, first.

Production of coastal fisheries become half.



漁業・養殖生産統計年鑑(農水省)より

Which species have decreased?

魚種	A	B	C	C/A	C/B
	1961~1965	1986~1990	2017~2021		
さけ類	77,787	165,007	64,330	0.83	0.39
ます類	59,072	17,142	5,864	0.10	0.34
しらす	28,039	84,167	57,635	2.06	0.69
ひらめ	7,998	6,593	6,529	0.82	0.99
かれい類	352,795	95,092	41,062	0.12	0.43
たちうお	40,812	30,860	6,557	0.16	0.21
まだい	25,108	13,447	15,706	0.63	1.17
ちだい・きだい	13,592	6,533	6,023	0.44	0.92
ちだい	3,685	1,153	3,767	1.02	3.27
きだい	9,907	5,380	3,760	0.38	0.70
くろだい・へだい	3,842	3,993	2,849	0.74	0.71
魚類	-	-	406	-	-
さわら類	4,173	9,068	15,491	3.71	1.71
すずき類	6,291	5,804	5,985	0.95	1.03
いかなご類	85,806	99,846	9,456	0.11	0.09
はも	31,015	6,898	-	-	-
とびうお類	12,812	10,999	-	-	-
あなご類	-	-	3,099	-	-
いさぎ	-	-	3,555	-	-
あまだい類	-	-	1,184	-	-
ぶく類	-	-	4,869	0.35	0.22
その他の魚類	437,236	756,814	157,386	-	-
甲殻類	73,481	41,263	12,621	0.17	0.31
くるとまへび	3,096	3,092	292	0.09	0.09
いせえび	1,561	1,115	1,093	0.70	0.98
がざみ類	2,331	3,898	2,109	0.90	0.54
貝類	4,521	3,907	806	0.18	0.21
さざえ	5,995	9,355	5,158	0.92	0.55
あさり類	118,372	92,056	6,403	0.05	0.07
ほたてがい	8,479	166,713	316,423	37.32	1.90
はまぐり類	17,143	2,811	-	-	-
うばがい(ほっき)	6,010	7,171	-	-	-
ざるぼう(もがい)	31,125	11,649	-	0.19	0.29
その他の貝類	106,035	79,544	29,670	-	-
頭足類	66,270	49,778	33,363	0.50	0.67
うに類	18,604	21,491	7,297	0.39	0.34
うなぎ類	144,514	134,661	47,627	0.33	0.35
海産類	59,335	6,140	-	-	-
わかめ類	13,333	9,023	-	-	-
でんくき類	1,827	1,051	-	0.15	0.38
その他の海藻類	62,178	37,899	20,551	-	-

Sand lance has decreased drastically (-91%).

Japanese tiger (Kuruma) prawn has decreased drastically (-91%).

Japanese short-neck (Asari) clam has decreased drastically (-93%).

Kelp has decreased (-65%).

Fishing ground loss due to reclamation is one reason.

On the other hand, the reality of a "clean sea" not being a "rich sea".

6. About MEL

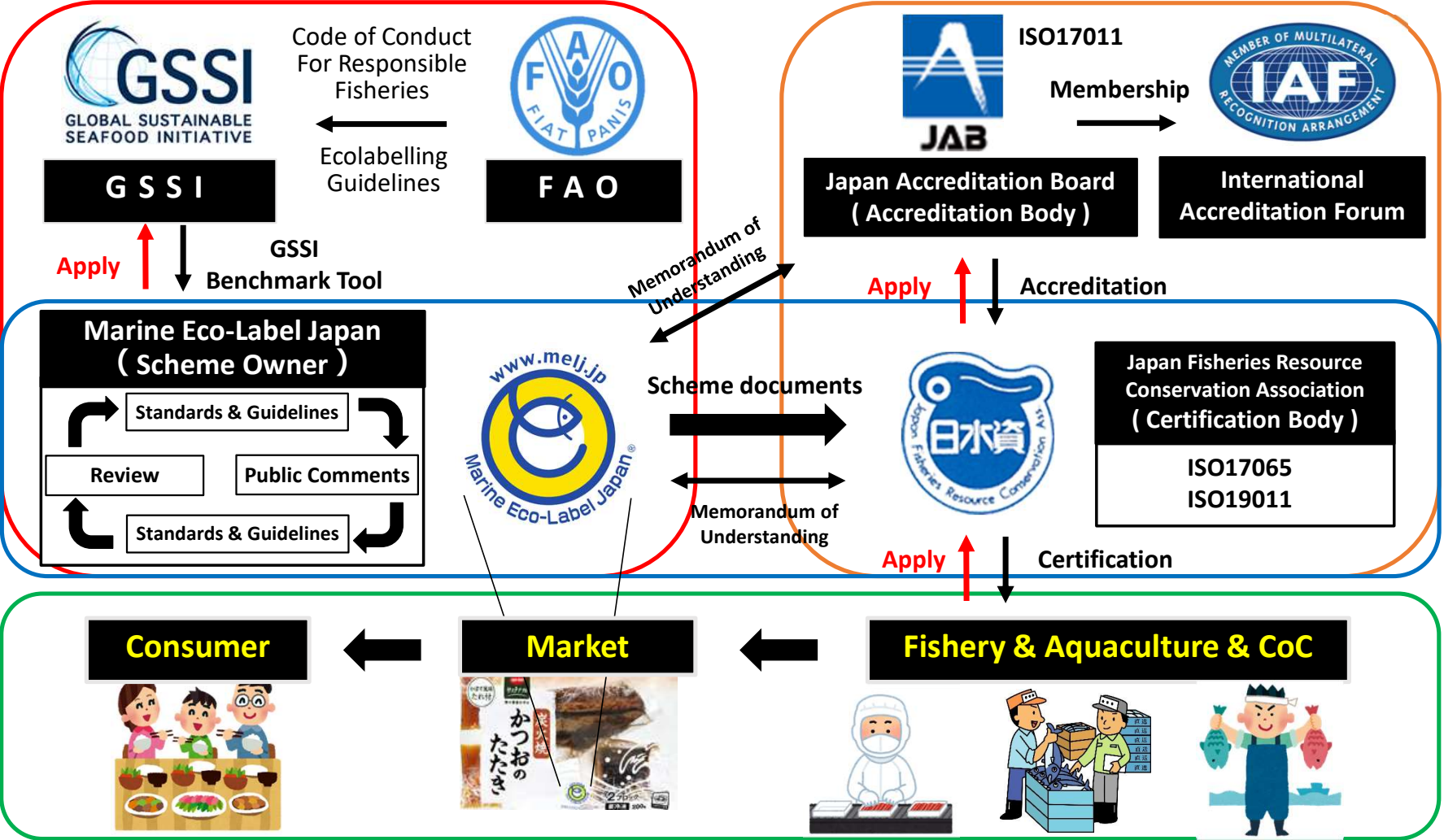
The origin of MEL traces back to Marine Eco-Label Japan, founded in 2007 by Japan Fisheries Association following the adoption of FAO ecolabeling guidelines. In 2016, it was called upon to reform under the political leadership, and following thorough review by experts, it started again as "**Marine Eco-Label Japan Council (MEL Council)**" with the mission of **realizing international standardization**. The promotion of sustainability ecolabels was clearly stated in the "Basic Plan for Fisheries" in 2017 and incorporated into the national fisheries policy. The new "Basic Plan for Fisheries" of 2022 succeeds the policy.

- ◆ MEL was recognized by the GSSI in December 2019, and made its world debut. (9th in the world and the first in Asia to be recognized)
- ◆ In November 2021, MEL successfully finished **Monitoring of Continued Alignment**.

7. The Basic Viewpoint of MEL Council

- (1) Develop **Japanese certification standards** that comply with FAO guidelines and ISO rules, and meet the GSSI's Global Benchmark Tool.
- (2) MEL perceives "sustainable seafood" to be "seafood for which efforts are made to maintain resources so that they are optimally utilized for future generations."
- (3) **Our mission is to protect and sustainably utilize the ecosystem and marine resources, while at the same time protecting the sustainability of the industry.**
- (4) MEL contributes to the promotion of diverse and high-quality seafood products by Japan's producers to the world. MEL contributes to protect Japan's national interests and do not place undue burdens on business operators.
- (5) **MEL considers it an important role not only to benefit industry but also to serve society and consumers, in other words, to fulfill its "social responsibility."**
- (6) **MEL considers seafood ecolabel to be an "infrastructure for a sustainable society" and a "mechanism that promises ultimate traceability."**

8. International Standardization & Third Party Certification



Framework for international recognition and accreditation

Framework for Certification

Social life

MEL standards comply with FAO and GSSI requirements.

9. MEL Certified Entities



The total number of certifications is almost about 50% of the target of 500 in 2027.

There are 33 certified fish species. Production volume was 380,000 t which **account for 10% of Japan's national total (2022).**

Products with MEL logo count 229 items, sales volume of 18,000 tons, and sales value of 34 billion yen (2002).

Still, 11 prefectures with no certifications.

By fishing method, zero for trawling fisheries. Food-service industry has practically zero certifications.

Examples of MEL-logo display on certified products



➤ In-store processed products (retail & restaurant)

Ito-Yokado (fresh sashimi)



Co-op Miyagi (fresh sashimi)



Yokohamaya Honpo Shokudo



Stores obtain CoC certification in order to display the logo on in-store processed products.

➤ Processed and packaged by certified manufacturers & vendors

JCCU, Co-op delivery (Shirasu anchovy)



(frozen)

Mie Gyoren Hanbai (Wakame seaweed)



(dry)

Myojin Suisan (Seared bonito)



(frozen)

Consumer packaged products with MEL logo can be handled by non-certified retailers.

MEL Logo display on BtoB products



Yellowtail by Yonkyu, Toyosu market



Yellowtail for export by Azumacho FCA



Red snapper for export by Ainan FCA



Yellowtail by Hyoshoku, at ARROM (distributor) in Barcelona central market



Seafood ecolabel exhibition area at Tokyo International Seafood Show (August, 2023)

MEL certified logos are now used by 97 certified businesses (July, 2023)

10. What is MEL going to do next?

- ◆ Seafood ecolabel is facing a "new age." Overcoming the high hurdles to realizing a sustainable fisheries industry and working together with stakeholders are important issues. In order to meet the growing expectations of society, the new age of seafood ecolabels is required to contribute to climate change, human rights issues, the reduction of marine plastics, the establishment of food safety, and the transparency of the supply chain, along with the tightening of standards.
- ◆ MEL's role is to ensure that the "combination of public and voluntary management", which is the hallmark of Japan's fisheries management, functions properly, and to communicate its effectiveness both internally and externally. Obtaining MEL is an endorsement of MEL's philosophy and means that the company is a partner in achieving the coexistence of "international standards for protecting the environment and resources" and "protecting Japanese industry and culture."

- ◆ As ESG and SDGs widespread in society, not only businesses but society as a whole must tackle the issue. Especially in fisheries where many small-scales operate, certification system can play a certain role. MEL lives up to its mandate.
- ◆ Expectations for domestic marine products are high. Reducing the environmental impact of livestock production, **national food security** and promoting exports. To achieve the 2030 export target of 1.2 trillion yen, it is essential to develop the fishery industry into a growth industry.
- ◆ The retail and food service industries also must commit to pursuing sociality in their management as environmental policy and purchasing policy. It is essential for producers to take the same viewpoint in order to continue business transactions.
- ◆ MEL is developing **aquaculture feed standards** to contribute in aquaculture industry's growth. Actively promoting exchanges with overseas stakeholders (such as **mutual recognition of CoC**) in order to powerup Japanese seafood industries and thereby benefiting certified entities and the society.

MEL continues our effort to protect national interests and promote transformation of seafood industry into growing industry.

7 years has passed since the MEL Council has launched.

Progress has been made steadily in international standardization, which was given as our first mission.

Next is contribution to humanity's tomorrow.

MEL takes it seriously as it evolves every day.



Thank you.