

Dec 31st 2024

MEL Council

MEL NEWS VOL. 81 (ENGLISH EDITION)

Dear MEL Partners:

The 6th year of Reiwa, which began with the Noto Peninsula earthquake on New Year's Day, is coming to an end. I would like to express my heartfelt sympathy to the people of the Noto region who are still forced to struggle in hardship, further exacerbated by the heavy rains in September. It has been a very difficult year for the seafood industry to sum up. Amid reports of record lowcatches and shellfish die-offs from various regions, we are pleased that the WCPFC Annual Meeting on December 3 agreed to increase the quota for catching Pacific bluefin tuna, which is the result of the efforts of the parties concerned to utilize the resource sustainably. As a next step, we hope that it becomes subject to the Fisheries Eco-Label certification. On the other hand, the transformation of seafood industry into a growth industry, which the public and private sectors are working on, does not have a clear path in sight. As our planet faces various problems, we have high hopes for actions to protect the oceans and protect resources, which utilization potentials are expanding in many directions.

1. International standardization related

The following report was received from the GSSI Secretariat.

The new CEO, Øyvind Ihle, has been active and attended the Global Shrimp Forum in the Netherlands in September, the IFFO's annual meeting (related to aquaculture feed) in Portugal in October, and the Global Sustainable Seafood Galicia Forum in Spain in November. The role of GSSI and seafood eco-labels was explained. The GSSI Steering Committee met for two days in Haarlem, the Netherlands in November. The board members got together to come up with new ideas and have in-depth discussions. I look forward to the further development of GSSI in the future.

It seems that the frequent staff turnovers are continuing, but the new CEO has finally started to move. We are requesting the CEO to visit Japan soon at some point of the coming year.

2. Status of MEL Certification

The certification is expected to come into effect this month for one aquaculture case and two CoC cases.

As of the end of December 2024, the number of valid certifications will be 266, including 25 in fisheries, 70 in aquaculture, and 171 in CoCs.

During the year, 37 certifications were issued (2 fisheries, 10 aquaculture, 25 CoCs) and 11 were withdrawn (6 aquacultures, 5 CoCs).

As this month's topic, Life Corporation has obtained CoC certification after a long pause in the retail industry. I would like to express my respect for the enthusiastic efforts of President Iwasaki and all the relevant departments. We hope that the certification will help customers increase their trust in your store and products. In addition, the certification of the Spanish Mackerel Seto Inland Sea Population by the Osaka Prefecture Purse Seine Fishery Cooperative Association has been suspended. This is a response to the fact that the stock level in the Seto Inland Sea Population fell below the B limit in the resource assessment released by the Japan Fisheries Research and Education Agency on September 29, 2023.

Even in the September 2024 evaluation published afterwards, the B limit has not been recovered. In recent years, the habitat of Spanish mackerel has been moving northward, and we have to accept that the effects of rising seawater temperatures have begun to extend to sustainability certification.

3. Voice from Certified Entities

Acquisition and utilization of MEL Certification for "Karadomari Ebisu Oysters

Kazuhisa Iwaki,

Chairman of the Operating Committee, Kratdomari Branch, Fukuoka City Fisheries Cooperative Association

The Fukuoka City Fisheries Cooperative Association Karadomari Branch, located on the western side of Hakata Bay in Fukuoka City, began oyster farming in 2001 after a decline in the catch of anchovies—the mainstay fish of winter fishing—and the inability to produce the famous dried anchovies (Niboshi) in a stable manner.

Our "Karadomari Ebisu Oysters," produced in a harvesting area for raw consumption oysters, are characterized by their rich flavor and the large, chewy texture of their adductor muscle. In addition to the traditional raft farming method, the recently introduced basket farming method allows us to grow beautiful cup-shaped oysters yearround, earning high praise domestically and internationally.



Chariman Kazuhisa Iwaki

While formulating the "Karadomari Ebisu Ovster Fishing Ground Improvement Plan" to prevent overcrowding in the farming environment, we received advice from international partners suggesting that obtaining a seafood ecolabel would add value. This led us to recognize the need to acquire internationally standardized seafood ecolabel certification to promote exports and branding. With the support of Fukuoka City and others, we prepared the application and recently succeeded in obtaining MEL certification.

We have received congratulatory messages from top-tier restaurants both in Japan and abroad regarding the MEL certification for "Karadomari Ebisu Oysters," and we feel the heightened attention to certified seafood. Certified seafood is gaining recognition not only internationally but also domestically, and its demand is expected to grow. Therefore, in addition to direct sales through oyster huts and e-commerce, we aim to expand the sales channels of "Karadomari Ebisu Oysters" to domestic and international restaurants.



Karadomari Ebisu Oyster

On the other hand. the MEL certification system is not widely known among Japanese consumers. Along with the members of the MEL Council and those who have obtained certification before us, we aim to promote MEL as an internationally standardized seafood ecolabel.

Finally, we will continue to engage in environmentally conscious sustainable farming so that our proud "Karadomari Ebisu Oysters" can be enjoyed by people worldwide for years to come. *Please check out the amazing press release materials at the following URL: https://www.melj.jp/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/melnews202412_3.pdf*

4. Column

"Advocating for Zero-Emission Integrated Aquaculture"

Masahide Inui, Advisor, Suidosha Co., Ltd.

Feed-based fish aquaculture has significantly reduced its environmental impact compared to the era of raw fish feed practices. However, leftover feed and excrement are still discharged, generating organic matter strains in surrounding marine areas. This organic matter eventually decomposes and dissolves into the water as nutrients such as nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P). Excessive nutrient loads can lead to hypoxia and red tides, acceleratina coastal environmental degradation. For instance, reports indicate that 30% of the nitrogen from feed is absorbed into fish bodies, while the remaining 70% is released into the environment. However, if this load is efficiently converted into biological production, it could simultaneously maintain a healthy environment and support biological productivity.

Such material-circulating aquaculture was once observed in China, where the "Four Domesticated Fish"—black carp, grass carp, silver carp, and bighead carp—were cultivated together in ponds. The nutrients loaded into the ponds fueled photosynthesis, promoting the growth of phytoplankton and aquatic plants. Phytoplankton served as feed for silver carp, while aquatic plants became food for grass carp. Animal plankton that multiplied from primary production was consumed by bighead carp, and the fish excretion nurtured benthic organisms at the bottom of the pond, which were then eaten by black carp. In this ecosystem, nutrient inputs were recycled within the pond, ultimately being harvested as "food" useful to humans.



Advisor Masahide Inui

Unlike livestock farming, where cattle, chickens, and pigs are fed plants, marine

fish farming involves "raising fish with fish," leading to a focus on feed alternatives, such as insects. In Japan, a historical example of material-circulating aquaculture can be found in the Saku region of Nagano Prefecture, where rice paddies were used to farm carp. The silkworm pupae left after silk production, considered waste, were utilized as carp feed. The carp's excrement served as fertilizer for rice cultivation, completing the material cycle. However, the decline of the sericulture industry led to the demise of material-circulating carp farming. Although the brand "Saku Carp" survives to this day, its original farming methods are not passed down.

While the closed systems of inland waters are easier to manage and historically allowed for such aquaculture practices, examples of integrated aquaculture in marine environments have been scarce to date. Japan's fish farming regions, often located in semi-enclosed environments such as bays, suggest that with proper local management systems, implementation is feasible.

About 4–5 years ago, I visited Shishijima Island, part of Nagashima Town in Izumi District, Kagoshima Prefecture. This island belongs to Azumacho Fisheries Cooperative Association, the first to obtain MEL aquaculture certification. Around the island, fish farming of yellowtail and red sea bream, along with algae farming of Enteromorpha (a type of

seaweed), is conducted. Enteromorpha farming is carried out by 70 entities, making it one of the top production areas alongside Mie Prefecture. Additionally, an increasing number of fishermen are pursuing oyster farming. Around this island, nitrogen and phosphorus loads originating from fish farming become fertilizer for Enteromorpha, while plankton proliferating via photosynthesis serves as oyster feed. If sea cucumbers are introduced into the seabed of oyster farming facilities, they could grow by consuming oyster excrement. Fish feed inputs from aquaculture would consequently contribute to the production of Enteromorpha, oysters, and sea cucumbers, while also supporting the maintenance of a healthy marine environment. Reducing the environmental burden of fish farming and adopting material-circulating intearated aquaculture could become the ideal model for future feed-based aquaculture. It's essentially about converting "external diseconomies," such as water pollution, "external economies" into through integrated aquaculture.

While the concept is simple, its implementation faces various challenges. My recommendations for realizing this include:

- (1) Monitoring the concentration of nutrients and primary production.
- (2) Controlling aquaculture production

scale based on monitoring results. Effective management is key, potentially requiring models to account for variations due to weather and ocean conditions.

- (3) Adjusting the number of operators and production scales based on monitoring data, given that fishery rights in reality are exercised by multiple cooperative members.
- (4) Securing funding for monitoring and management costs.

While Japan's Fisheries Act grants exclusive licenses for specific area fishery rights to cooperatives, allowing them to allocate income from fishing rights usage fees toward funding and coordination

5. Board Meeting Held

The board meeting was held on November 25, where the regularly report on business execution status was presented. Alongside this, revisions to the regulations were deliberated and approved.

- (1) Revision to Membership Rules: A clause was added specifying that membership fees for members who join midway through the fiscal year and are approved in the second half shall be half the annual fee for that fiscal year.
- (2) Regulations for the Use and Management of MEL Logo: A new

among members, challenges related to monitoring remain. Collaboration with local research institutions and universities is essential to establish an effective support system.

The term "eco" has become widely used today to describe environmental friendliness and planet-positive initiatives. However, its original meaning stems from "ecology," the study of ecosystems. From this perspective, future aquaculture concepts that reduce environmental loads and maintain healthy ecosystems through material circulation will be sought after. Since MEL aquaculture certification began in February 2019, six years have passed. I hope to see further development toward new ideals in aquaculture.

provision was added allowing the council to grant limited usage rights of the logo mark to non-certified restaurant operators only when deemed to contribute to the promotion of MEL certification.

(3) Addition to MEL Logo Regulation Regarding GSSI: GSSI has approved certified entities to display that their scheme complies with GSSI standards on certified seafood packaging, following the public relations rule. Consequently, the display method was incorporated into the MEL Logo Mark Usage and Management Regulations.

- (4) Approval of Name Changes and Mergers of Members: Two new names were approved due to name changes and mergers:
 - Benirei Co., Ltd. changed to Marubeni Seafood Co., Ltd.
 - Kaneko Sangyo Co., Ltd. and Seinan Suisan Co., Ltd. merged, forming Nissui Maguro Co., Ltd.

Additionally, progress reports were shared, including updates on fisheries certification standards revision, CoC certification standards revision, development of feed and fishmeal/fish oil certification standards, and mutual recognition of CoC certification with CSC.

6. Progress on Key Issues

Steady progress has been made on this fiscal year's key topics:

- (1) Discussions were held with the Japan Accreditation Board (JAB) to address issues concerning mutual recognition of CoC certification with the U.S. CSC.
- (2) A situation briefing was provided to the Fisheries Agency's Cultivation and Aquaculture Division regarding feed standards and fishmeal/fish oil certification standards.

7. TSSS2024 Archive Video Released

The archive video of Session 2, Day 2 of TSSS2024 titled "Where is Japan's Fisheries Industry Headed?"—which took place in October—is now available. It including features speakers Japan Fisheries Association Chairman Edamoto, National Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations Chairman

- (3) Opinions on feed standards and fishmeal/fish oil certification standards were exchanged with the Japan Aquaculture Feed Association and the MEL Standards Committee, with discussions with the Fishmeal Association planned next.
- (4) A working group meeting on CoC standards revision was held, with drafts completed for processing and retail versions among the three (processing, wholesale, retail) versions.

Sakamoto, Professor Yagi from the University of Tokyo, Usufuku Honten President Usui, MEL Council President Kakizoe, and moderator CEO Hanaoka. The video is published by Seafood Legacy Co., Ltd., and can be viewed free of charge using the provided URL and QR code.



https://x.gd/VJvWQ

EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on the International Treaty for Plastic Waste Reduction, held in Busan, South Korea, could not reach an agreement and postponed its decision.

The issue is perceived as serious within the fisheries industry, where various actions are being undertaken. However, compared to climate change, the shared sense of damage is harder to grasp, and the difficulty of resolving the problem at a single country level is keenly felt.

Recently, while on the Hokuriku Shinkansen, I came across an article in the December issue of "Nishi Navi" titled "In Search of 'kito-kito' Seafood: Journey to Toyama Shinminato." (kito-kito: freshness) The article featured the white shrimp fishery of Shinminato Fisheries Cooperative, which obtained MEL certification just after the earthquake in January. It was introduced as a testament to "the ingenuity of Toyama fishermen." Once again, I'd like to extend my respect for everyone's creativity and efforts that embody true "kito-kito."

Thank you for staying with MEL News throughout this year. I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed articles despite their busy schedules.

May you have a wonderful New Year!

MEL Certified Products of the month: Wakame Seaweed Certified entities: Taro-cho Fisheries Cooperative Association

MEL Council Secretariats Nittochi Uchisaiwaicho Bldg. 3F, 1-2-1 Uchisaiwaicho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0011 Japan URL: https://melj.jp/eng/ Email: <u>info@melj.jp</u>