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MEL Council

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Dear MEL Partners:

Happy New Year to everyone. Though belated, I would like to sincerely extend my New Year greetings. 2025, the Year of the Kinoto-Mi (Wood Snake), has tiptoed into our lives amidst the uncertainties and anxieties of unclear times. As heavy news continues to surface daily, the fisheries industry, which holds great promise for food security, cannot escape the effects of changing marine environments or a declining population. We aspire to persistently address challenges and do our best to navigate through adverse circumstances.

1. International standardization related

As it has been one year since MEL's aquaculture certification standards and fisheries certification standards were recognized under the new GSSI Benchmark Tool (Version 2), GSSI's continued alignment review (MOCA) began in the late December 2024.

Consequently, recent audit reports, revised regulations, and the latest operational reports are submitted in English. After submission, each category will be reviewed by Independent Experts (IEs). Preparations are underway for the submission deadline at the end of January.

2. Status of MEL Certification

There were no certifications issued this month.

3. Voice from Certified Entities

"Towards Reconstruction and Sustainable Fisheries Distribution"

***Misa Takeda,
Management Department,
Ishikawa Central Fish Market Co., Ltd.***

Our company, based in the Kanazawa Central Wholesale Market in Ishikawa Prefecture, celebrates its 59th anniversary this year. We obtained the MEL (CoC certification) in 2020 and became the first company in the Hokuriku region to achieve the approval of international recognized MEL certification.

It has now been one year since the 2024 Noto Peninsula Earthquake, and we were given the opportunity by the MEL Council to discuss efforts to recover market channels for Ishikawa's fisheries products.

As many of you may know, fisheries stakeholders in the Noto region suffered significant damages, including damaged vessels, raised seabeds, and collapsed factories. While our company did not experience major physical or human losses, the "Morning Auction," known for handling Ishikawa's marine products since 2008, has been suspended. A majority of the consignors for this auction were producers in the Noto region.



Scene from Former Morning Auction

Amidst such adversity, we also encountered new connections. Through the MEL Council, we were approached by "AFF Restaurant," within the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries in Tokyo, expressing interest in utilizing seafood products from Ishikawa Prefecture. As part of the Ishikawa Reconstruction Fair, they served menus featuring our local products. We are sincerely grateful for the support and cooperation extended from various sectors.



**Grilled Spanish mackerel of Ishikawa,
seasoned in salted rice malt**

So far, I've touched upon topics beyond certification, but as a company, we have yet to establish a prominent certified distribution channel. We are committed to exploring and realizing this goal. Additionally, with the recent revision of the logo usage and management regulations, a new provision allowing "limited use of the logo for food service businesses" has been introduced. We believe this can help promote certified seafood products to end-users, enhancing visibility and creating

opportunities for consumers to purchase them.

Finally, our company will continue to provide as much support as possible for

the ongoing reconstruction of Noto. We are dedicated to ensuring that marine products from Ishikawa reach people across Japan. We kindly ask for your continued support in these endeavors.

Thank you, Ms. Takeda, for your article contribution. As the media highlights the abundant catch of yellowtail fish, brightening the news, we also reflect on the challenges of recovery from natural disasters, 30 years after the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake and 14 years after the Great East Japan Earthquake. Fisheries are an indispensable resource that supports Japan's food supply. We sincerely hope the activities in Noto return to normal and that the MEL Council can contribute to these efforts.

4. Column

"Why is Certification Necessary?"

***Masaaki Edamoto,
Japan Fisheries Association***

I have been asked to contribute to the January issue of MEL News. First of all, I sincerely wish that 2025 will be a safe and happy year for everyone.

In the past, I have worked in the agricultural field, where I was involved in promoting GAP. Today, I would like to share some of that experience.



President Masaaki Edamoto

GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) is a process of implementing, recording, inspecting, and evaluating each step in agricultural production to achieve continuous improvement. Internationally recognized GAP includes five areas: food safety, environmental conservation, labor safety, human rights protection, and farm management. You can think of it as the agricultural version of MEL.

GLOBALG.A.P. in Europe has advanced, and Japan has ASIAGAP and JGAP

(managed by the Japan GAP Foundation and accredited by JAB), with ASIAGAP receiving GFSI approval. Similar certification programs also exist in Canada, the U.S., and Australia.

When promoting GAP, initial discussions often revolved around basic questions like "What benefits does it have?" or "Does certification mean higher sales?" Explaining that certifications alone wouldn't lead to higher sales but that they help improve individual operations, maintain and enhance the brand power of Japanese agricultural products, and strengthen competitiveness in the global food market was challenging to get across. Highlighting real-world benefits observed by practitioners, such as reduced cross-contamination risk from pesticides, increased employee responsibility, shorter overall working hours, and improved evaluations from customers, was crucial, even though it was a patient and gradual process.

Three notable milestones that significantly contributed to GAP's promotion include:

- (1) Being adopted as the procurement standard for food at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games (and now integrated into the procurement standards for the upcoming Osaka-Kansai Expo).*
- (2) Establishing a group certification*

system (to reduce the burden on individual small-scale operations, allowing organizations like agricultural cooperatives to manage and oversee the certification process collectively).

- (3) In 2015, Aomori Prefectural Goshogawara Agricultural High School obtained GLOBALG.A.P. certification for apple cultivation and storage by its students. In 2016, the school became the world's first educational institution to win the GLOBALG.A.P. Award at an event held in the Netherlands. Currently, 97 agricultural high schools across Japan have obtained GAP certification, hosting GAP study sessions and incorporating GAP into their operations through graduates who pursue careers in farming.*

These are my experiences with the dissemination of GAP. As of the end of March 2024, 7,738 agricultural and livestock operations in Japan have obtained GAP certification. While further efforts are needed, it has grown significantly thanks to many people's dedication.

In reality, agricultural and fisheries products are served together at the dinner table, and Japanese cuisine, which is now part of global food culture, exemplifies this combination. I hope that MEL and ASIAGAP, as Japan-originated frameworks,

will work hand in hand to become a standard in Japan, gain global recognition, and serve as indispensable tools for sustainable food systems worldwide.

Thank you, President Edamoto, for your message. As MEL was launching, we received guidance from GAP stakeholders who had already laid the groundwork. Reflecting on how we approached system design under the assumption that the fisheries industry is one-tenth the scale of agriculture feels like yesterday. We will continue to learn from and collaborate with GAP as we move forward.

5. Events

Report on two events MEL has participated in (or will participate in):

- (1) *From January 10th to 19th, 2025, MEL was introduced at Maruha Nichiro's booth during the "Food and Life" exhibition at Tokyo Midtown Hibiya. This event, themed "Thinking about Social Issues of Food" to connect Japan's food culture to the future, provided an opportunity for Maruha Nichiro, a member organization of MEL, to promote sustainable seafood. MEL was featured in their panel display, and leaflets and brochures about MEL were made available.*



Panel Display of Sustainable Seafood by Maruha Nichiro

- (2) *MEL will participate for the sixth time in the "Biodiversity Minato Forum (Panel Exhibition)" hosted by the Greening Promotion Division of the Environmental Recycling Support Department, Minato City. The exhibition will be held from Saturday, January 24th to Wednesday, January 29th, 2025, at the Atrium on the first floor of Minato Park Shibaura and the plaza in front of the café, as well as from Friday, January 31st to Friday, February 7th, 2025, at the first-floor lobby of Minato City Hall. Please feel free to stop by if you're in the area.*



MEL Panel Display in Minato City

6. Executive Director Nagaoka Participated in a workshop in Vietnam

On January 15th-16th, the Japan Fisheries Association held a workshop on sustainable utilization of fishery resources in Ho Chi Minh City and Tuy Hoa City, Phu Yen Province. Executive Director Nagaoka explained Japan's efforts and outlook on resource management, as well as MEL initiatives, from both the Association and the MEL Council perspectives.



Scene from Tuy Hoa Workshop

In Ho Chi Minh, attendees included executives from companies importing Japanese fish and distributing them to Japanese restaurants and other dining chains. In Tuy Hoa, participants included the Deputy Director of the province's Investment Bureau, owners of tuna longline fishing vessels, and executives of seafood processing companies.

The former group showed great interest due to their dealings with Japanese intermediaries certified by MEL and awareness of Western-owned hotels seeking certified seafood eco-label products. The latter group expressed their consideration of pursuing MSC certification for tuna processing, looking to reference MEL's approach.

As a foothold for MEL's expansion in Asia, efforts will continue to maintain contact.

7. Good news from MEL Ambassador

We have received a notification from MEL Ambassador Nocchimimi, about his workplace, Beisia supermarket (which operates shopping centers across Tokyo

and 14 prefectures around the Kanto region). He reported that products from Shimaji Suisan (located in Arida City, Wakayama Prefecture), "Kamaage

Shirasu" (boiled and dried baby anchovy), certified by MEL, have been stocked in their stores.

Furthermore, these products have passed



Shirasu product by Shimaji Suisan with MEL logo mark and Karushio mark

the "Karushio" certification system led by the National Cerebral and Cardiovascular Center as low-sodium goods, and proudly displayed both marks.



EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT

At the start of the year, two newspaper articles caught my attention.

The first article, published on January 10th by the EU's meteorological agency "Copernicus Climate Change Service," reported that the average global temperature for 2024 had exceeded the Paris Agreement target of limiting temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, reaching 1.6°C. The severity of global warming cannot be ignored; this issue affects not only land but also oceans.

The second article, featured as the lead story on the front page of the January 12th Sunday edition of Nikkei Shimbun, titled "Farmed Fish Surpassing Beef, Closing in on Pork," highlighted the importance of aquaculture and fisheries systems for food security. It also emphasized that aquaculture is crucial for mitigating climate change compared to livestock, aligning with the joint declaration made by G20 agriculture ministers in September last year. While farmed seafood in Japan has not yet surpassed wild-caught volumes, it seems poised to draw significant media attention this year.

This year is expected to bring many challenges. I hope to move forward together, sharing

information along the way.

MEL Certified Products of the month: Oyster

Certified entities: Yamashita Suisan and Jigozen FCA

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