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MEL Council

## **MEL NEWS VOL. 83 (ENGLISH EDITION)**

Dear MEL Partners:

*A month has passed since the world was shaken by the reinstated President Trump. It truly feels like the Year of the Kinoto-Mi (Wood Snake), marked by uncertainty. The real unpredictable events are yet to come, and I intend to brace myself with vigilance.*

*Following the cold wave at the beginning of spring and now the strongest and longest cold wave of the season, I am hearing reports of heavy snow damage from various regions and feel a pang of sorrow here in Tokyo, where the skies remain clear. For the fishing industry, heavy snow is said to bring spring meltwater mixing with seawater, revitalizing the ecosystem of the Sea of Japan and leading to bountiful catches of various fish species. I hope this folklore turns into reality.*

### **1. International standardization related**

*In response to the continuation alignment review (MOCA) initiated by GSSI last December, we submitted translations of meeting minutes and reports related to various activities of the MEL Council, audit reports from certification bodies, and documents related to certification and accreditation organizations by the end of January.*

*Currently, three Independent Experts (IEs) are conducting their reviews. Sections A and B, which cover governance and management, are being handled by Mr. Osires de Melo, who has over 40 years of experience across four continents. Section*

*C, concerning aquaculture, is under Dr. Sophie Fridman, who has over 25 years of experience in the aquaculture industry, including vaccine development. Section D, focused on fisheries, is overseen by Mr. Charlie Horsnell, who works at the auditing firm Key Traceability Ltd.*

*All three IEs are reviewing MEL certification for the first time, making it difficult to anticipate their feedback. It is assumed that none of them, including the new CEO Mr. Øyvind Ihle, have expertise regarding Japan's seafood industry. For the time being, we will wait for questions from the IEs and respond accordingly. We*

*ask for your continued cooperation.*

## **2. Status of MEL Certification**

*Since the previous issue of MEL News was distributed, one aquaculture certification was issued at the end of January. Additionally, three CoC certifications were issued this month.*

*As a special note, following Life Corporation in December, Izumi Co., Ltd. became the sixth case of CoC certification in the retail industry. Their initiative, which began in 2019, has now reached certification under the leadership of*

*Yoshimichi Tomokuni, Director of the Fresh Seafood Department, overcoming various challenges along the way.*

*Izumi Co., Ltd. operates stores in the Chugoku, Shikoku, and Kyushu regions. As a scheme owner, we are delighted that MEL-certified retailers have rapidly expanded west of the Kansai region. We encourage everyone to make use of this development.*

## **3. Voice from Certified Entities**

### **"Appreciation for the Ocean"**

*I was born in Eiki, Kochi Prefecture, Sukumo City, Kozukushi Town, and grew up with Sukumo Bay. The sea in front of me, which had always been a natural part of my life, seemed ordinary as I was born into the family of a fish farmer. However, while studying for about a year to acquire MEL certification, I realized that what I took for granted was not actually so. I became acutely aware of my immaturity as I came to understand that we are merely borrowing the sea to engage in aquaculture.*

**Hirosada Takagi,  
President, Hirotaka Suisan**



**President Hirosada Takagi**

*The motivation to obtain MEL certification came from my prior knowledge about it. However, driven by*

*the need to stay competitive in terms of marketing and branding, I made up my mind to pursue it. As a small-scale operator, it was a challenge to handle all the documentation and site investigations on my own. But, in turn, this deepened my awareness of the sea and made me feel like I had truly grasped the concept of sustainability anew. Moving forward, I aim to practice sustainable aquaculture to give back to Sukumo Bay through my aquaculture business.*

*Although there is currently no certification distribution flow, just arriving at this understanding alone has made obtaining MEL certification worthwhile. I am delighted to have*

*been able to meet other certified producers through MEL certification. In recent years, while efficiency through AI and labor reduction has been a hot topic and concerns about workforce shortages are being raised, it feels as though intelligence is running ahead on its own. Amid this, I believe it is crucial to balance intelligence with perception and pursue certainty.*

*In conclusion, through MEL certification, I want to earnestly ensure that people care for one another, stand united as one, and, no matter what challenges come our way, work together to enhance Japan's marine resources even further.*

*Thank you, Mr. Takagi, for the opportunity to greet you at the certificate award ceremony. I resonated with your quiet passion and deeply respect the effort you put into achieving this certification. MEL will continue to strive to be of service, and I appreciate your continued support moving forward.*

#### **4. Column**

##### ***"Japanese Fisheries as Seen from Developing Countries"***

***Minoru Tamura,  
International Cooperation Specialist (Fisheries),  
Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)***

*Recently, I returned from a business trip to Côte d'Ivoire in West Africa, a journey of about 20 hours by connecting flights from Narita Airport. During my visit, I heard from the locals about the "Surimi*

*Workshop" conducted by Ms. Yuriko Shiraishi, representative of the NPO "Sea Country Japan" and a member of the MEL Advisory Board, along with her team. I was deeply inspired by their active*

engagement. As for me, my visit aimed to provide technical cooperation from Japan to promote aquaculture in Côte d'Ivoire. It's fascinating how Japanese fisheries technologies are being embraced even in such a distant place as West Africa. From an overseas perspective, it seems that Japan still has many appealing technologies to offer.



**Mr. Minoru Tamura (left) and Chief Cabinet Secretary Assoumani of Côte d'Ivoire (right)**

Japan is home to numerous businesses that not only excel in fisheries and aquaculture production but also possess advanced knowledge and techniques for sustainable resource management and appropriate practices. A prime example of these businesses would be those certified with MEL. With the expansion of MEL-certified businesses, I hope the appeal of sustainable fisheries will spread further among us Japanese as well. MEL's distinct characteristic lies in the way Japan's rich

diversity in fisheries is reflected within the certification framework.

This system aligns well with the unique nature of Japanese fisheries, such as small-scale operations that harvest a variety of species. In 2024, I visited fisheries in regions like the Caribbean, South Pacific, Southeast Asia, and Africa. What stood out across all developing countries is their shared reliance on small-scale fisheries that harvest multiple species. Of course, the scale of these small-scale fisheries varies by country—from ultra-small operations using hand-paddled canoes and hand fishing, tropical fishers diving all day to spear fish, to those operating small boats powered by 40-horsepower engines and hauling hundreds of kilograms of fish back to port.

In developing countries, efforts primarily focus on improving the income of small-scale fishers through methods like improving efficiency in fishing; meaning they are far from establishing their own fisheries certification systems. At the same time, there is always an inherent responsibility to address sustainable resource management. Under such circumstances, MEL's certification standards serve as a valuable reference when formulating and structuring technical cooperation for developing countries. For example, considerations include the management system in place, the utilization of target resources, and whether ecosystem conservation is

*ensured. With that, a balanced approach is sought, combining Japan's sustainable resource management experience with the introduction of Japanese expertise and technologies to advance their fisheries industries.*

*Although I've meandered from West Africa to various other regions, what I want to emphasize again is that Japan's fisheries hold immense appeal, especially from the perspective of developing*

*countries. This appeal encompasses not just high production technologies for fisheries and aquaculture, but also the inclusion of sustainable resource management, which is highly regarded. Moving forward, I believe that MEL certification for businesses practicing such initiatives will also lead to increased recognition within Japan. Let us follow the example of Ms. Shiraishi and her team and strive to share the further appeal of Japan's fisheries with the broader world.*

*Thank you, Mr. Tamura. Reflecting on this reminds me of the lively atmosphere I experienced during my two sessions as an instructor for JICA's "On-the-Job Training for Fisheries and Aquaculture in the Gulf of Guinea" last January and July. Thinking about how Japanese fishing vessels pioneered offshore fishing grounds in the Gulf of Guinea back in the 1960s, and how the fish sold locally (mainly horse mackerel and mackerel) became the roots of current fish consumption there, I feel there are underlying connections that deepen these ties. I hope more countries will develop favorable impressions of Japan through its fisheries technology.*

#### **5. MEL Auditor CPD Training held**

*The MEL Auditor Training was conducted on February 13-14 as a CPD (Continued Professional Development) training. The training was held online, and ten certified auditors participated. The environment surrounding the seafood eco-label has been undergoing rapid changes. In response, certification standards are being revised as needed. It is essential for auditors working on-site to have the latest*

*information.*

*This year, in particular, is important for auditor training due to the undergoing revision of standards required every five years by GSSI for scheme owners. It is an important milestone for ensuring the continued relevance and effectiveness of the training programs.*

## 6. Seafood Show Osaka

The 22nd Seafood Show Osaka was held at the Osaka ATC Hall on February 19-20. Despite the clear weather with occasional flurries of snow, the event was filled with excitement and attracted over 10,000 visitors. Among the exhibits, OUG Holdings made a comeback after 12 years, bringing together their group companies (all MEL-certified) to attract visitors. Additionally, Kyodo Senpaku made their first appearance with a bold presentation offering samples of their latest whale menu, creating a different and lively

atmosphere.

This year, the Seafood Eco-Label Corner was set up once again. The MEL-certified seafood exhibit not only showcased actual products but also included shelves with information about the certification holders, aiming to reduce waste and focus on cost-saving measures. The display featured 43 items from 22 companies, which caught the attention of retail and restaurant buyers who visited the booth.



**Display of MEL certified entities with their pamphlets and QR codes**

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### EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT

On the first day of the Seafood Show, a MEL certification ceremony, co-hosted by Nissui and Kaiseiken, was held, with participation from seven companies. We are delighted to welcome them into the MEL certification community and look forward to working together to achieve shared goals.

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: [info@melj.jp](mailto:info@melj.jp)*