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MEL Council

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Dear MEL Partners:

As the flashpoint in the Middle East continues to smolder, a direct attack by the United States on Iran's nuclear facilities was carried out. It should be thought of as the entry of the United States into the war in response to an attack and retaliation between Israel and Iran. There are no words about the fact that while they were talking about peace and saying that they did not want further expansion, the United States was preparing for a deliberate attack behind the scenes. It is extremely serious for the United States to break something that the international community has long regarded as a taboo and refrained from doing so. No matter how much sophistry is played, deviations from international norms cannot be avoided. From the perspective of Japan's emergency legislation, it is unrealistic for Japan's politics and economy to be left out of the picture, and it seems inevitable that the world will be caught up in a major vortex.

It has been 80 years since the Battle of Okinawa, and I can only pray that the inappropriate situation that occurred on "Remembrance Day" = Peace Prayer Day will be resolved as soon as possible.

1. International Standardization

The decision for continued approval of MEL has been delayed. MOCA was once discussed by the Benchmarking Committee. MEL has also requested that MEL participate as observers in the discussions of the Benchmark Committee and have the opportunity to explain the actual situation in Japan. Even if it takes time, I want to stick to our principles.

In addition, CSI (Certified Seafood International), which started its activities on April 24. The Board of Directors

meeting was held online on June 24. From Japan, Mr. Akiyo Matono, a member of the Board of Directors, participated, and Dr. Katoh, Secretary General of the MEL Council, who serves as the secretariat of Mr. Matono, was invited as an observer. Although the MEL Council will refrain from disseminating information on the content of the meeting, it was reported that CSI's activities are progressing smoothly.

2. Issuance of certification

One certification came into effect this month. It is an aquaculture certification for yellowtail by the Yusu Sustainable Bri Production Group in Uwajima City, Ehime Prefecture, and UTAKICHI Co., Ltd., which issued the certification last month in CoC, will be responsible for wholesale sales.

3. Voice from Certified Entities

We asked Mr. Shiro Sakashita, the representative of Marui Shoten, who has obtained MEL CoC certification, to report on whitebait, which has been experiencing unstable fishing conditions nationwide since last year.

"Delivering the bounty of the sea of Minamichita more deliciously"

**Shiro Sakashita, Representative Director
Marui Shoten Co., Ltd.**

Marui Shoten Co., Ltd. cherishes the desire to "deliver the bounty of the sea in Minamichita Town more deliciously" and manufactures processed seafood products made from fresh fish caught in Shizaki, Minamichita-cho, Aichi Prefecture. Among them, "Cooking

whitebait caught in this region, which boasts the largest whitebait catch in Japan, is our signature product. By cooking the raw shirasu as it is, it is characterized by a soft and plump texture and flavor that is not found in general tsukuni, and has been well



Marui Shoten Representative Shiro Sakashita's connoisseurship of raw materials

Fresh Shirasu", which is carefully finished using a unique "fresh cooking" manufacturing method using raw



**Marui Shoten's signature product:
"Raw cooking shirasu"**

received by many customers, and has received high praise, such as the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and

Fisheries Award.

About 30 years ago, I took on the challenge of making sardine fry whitebait, which was considered difficult at the time, to boil it raw. In Minamichita Town, mass production of dried whitebait is the mainstream, and the production of tsukudani (soy sauce taste) of small fish is unprecedented, and it was developed from scratch. In the wake of the temporary decline in the catch of whitebait, my father (now managing director), who is a developer, started the tsukudani business based on the idea of "shifting from mass production to high-quality low-volume production," bringing new value to the local whitebait industry. Today, the success of our company has led to an increase in the number of companies in the region that are engaged in the production of tsukudani.

Since raw whitebait can only be produced on days when there is fishing,

maintaining a stable production and supply system has become a major issue at a time when whitebait is not caught and fish prices continue to soar. In response to this situation, we have been diversifying our suppliers, striving to ensure traceability, and acquiring MEL certification, which is a proof of sustainable fishing. By doing so, we hope to promote the creation of environmentally friendly products and at the same time differentiate ourselves from other companies.

Now that MEL certification has been obtained, it cannot be said that the recognition of MEL certification among consumers is still high, but it is gradually gaining interest from major companies, and expectations are high for its future expansion. We will strive to spread and promote understanding of MEL certification, and contribute to the realization of a sustainable society while protecting marine resources.

Thank you very much. You can feel the commitment. In addition, it is clear that the accumulation of time and effort until the production technology of a single product is perfected is the source of today's fame. I wish you all the best for your continued development.

4. Column

This month, we asked Dr. Yutaro Sakai, Associate Professor at the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Life Sciences. Following on from Dr. Yagi's contribution last month, please see this series that will contribute to the revitalization of the fishery industry.

"The Potential of MEL Certification and Its Dissemination Strategy"

Yutaro Sakai, Associate Professor



**Associate Professor Yutaro Sakai,
The University of Tokyo**

There is a growing interest in social and environmental sustainability, such as the SDGs. However, sustainable seafood certifications such as MEL and MSC are not widely used in Japan. What is the reason for this? In fact, sustainable forest certifications such as FSC and SGEF are not very popular in Japan. If this is the case, it seems that the cause is not necessarily in the fisheries. On the other hand, eco-labels that have been relatively successful in Japan include organic JAS certification and unified energy-saving labels. These are labels that are (supposedly) have direct benefits to consumers, such as safety, security, and savings. Based on these observations, this paper examines the potential of MEL certification and strategies for its dissemination.

I believe that the reason why eco-labels

have not spread as widely in Japan as in Europe and the United States is deeply related to cultural and historical factors. In particular, the following two hypotheses are likely to be considered. First, it is said that there is a culture in Japan society that emphasizes the "contractor (person)" rather than the "contract" itself. In Europe and the United States, forms such as contracts and certifications are the foundation of trust, but in Japan, face-to-face transactions and relationships of trust between people tend to take precedence. As a result, formal guarantees such as labels and certifications are difficult for consumers to feel and convey value.

Second, Japanese view of nature is that people have a strong sense that people are kept alive in nature, and it is difficult for the idea of humans managing nature to take root. Japanese tend to think that nature is beyond human knowledge, and that choosing certified fishery products does not guarantee the sustainability of fishery resources.

If the above hypothesis is correct, it can be said that MEL certification has advantages compared to MSC certification. MEL certification is a certification system originating in Japan created through the collaboration of Japan fishers, fishery cooperatives, governments, and researchers. Compared to international certifications operated by overseas organizations, it can be said that

it has a foundation that makes it easier for Japanese consumers to trust because "the faces of Japan's fishers and local communities" can be seen behind them. If this is the case, it is likely that a good way to appeal to MEL certification is to focus on the presence of fishers rather than fishery resources. Previous experiments conducted in our laboratory have shown that Japanese find value in photographs of fishers rather than MSC labels. In addition, the fact that MEL certification has flexible standards that are in line with the actual conditions of the Japan fishery management system and regional resource management is considered to be an approach that is close to the Japanese view of nature, which is to coexist with nature. Rather than managing resources from above, pushing out the nuance of sustainable coexistence with nature may be the key to increasing affinity with the way Japanese consumers think.

On the other hand, in light of the success of organic JAS certification and unified energy-saving labels, it is also important to appeal to the "direct benefits" for consumers. These labels are successful not simply because they have social significance, but because consumers intuitively understand the benefits that are directly related to their lives, such as health and safety, and reduced electricity bills. From this point of view, it is important to emphasize the

value of "safe and secure domestic fishery products" for MEL certification. Also, for overseas audiences, it may be effective to appeal to the brand image of high-quality fishery products produced in Japan as a set.

Another point I would like to touch on regarding the dissemination of MEL certification is that there can be positive feedback that the dissemination of certification in society itself increases its value. If consumers have more opportunities to see the MEL certification label at supermarkets and restaurants, the recognition that "certified fish = reliable fish" will spread, fishers and distributors will be more motivated to obtain certification, and the amount of certified products in circulation will increase, creating a virtuous cycle in which recognition will further spread. In order to create such a virtuous cycle, it is necessary for the government and industry to work together to create a certain number of certified fisheries. Paradoxically, it is not because of the benefits that people get certified, but there are benefits to having more fishers obtain certifications.

MEL certification has great potential and is extremely interesting as a unique certification rooted in Japan culture and values. I will strongly support its dissemination through empirical research and policy proposals.

Thank you very much, Dr. Sakai. The relationship between eco-label certification and society in Japan was covered from a new perspective, and it was an eye-opener for me.

We hope that we will continue to be able to conduct research and action together with your guidance.

5. The Ordinary General Meeting of the MEL Council was held.

On June 24, the 11th Ordinary General Assembly of the MEL Council was held. Of the 49 regular members, 3 were attended by the representative himself, 16 were represented by his representative, and 30 were in attendance by those who exercised their voting rights in writing. Two members of the Advisory Board participated, and Deputy Director Fujita from the Fisheries Agency (unexpectedly announced his promotion to Commissioner on July 1), Mr. Yoshikawa, Assistant Director of the Certification Promotion Group, Processing and

and it was finally realized.

Deputy Director Fujita said that MEL

(1) contributes to resource management

(2) contributes to export promotion

(3) communicates our fundamental ideas to the world

(4) will change its attitude from following to leading the world.

In addition, the Fisheries Agency stated that the Fisheries Eco-Label will contribute to the realization of the sustainable use of marine products and promote its dissemination and utilization as a system that plays a part in alleviating global environmental problems.

Since it was an Ordinary General Assembly, the business report and financial results were approved. As special notes, MEL Fisheries Management Standard Ver. 3.0 was approved and in the appointment of director, it was approved that Mr. Masaki Yasuda from the Hokkaido Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations was appointed as a director as his successor following the retirement of Mr. Motohiro Kikuchi from the Hokkaido Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to Mr. Kikuchi, who has retired, for his contribution to the operation of MEL and wish him good health in the future.



Greetings from Deputy Director-General Fujita of the Fisheries Agency

Distribution Division, Fisheries Department, and others attended.

Mr. Fujita, Deputy Director-General, was the head of the Planning Division when the "Fisheries Eco-Label Promotion" was positioned in the Basic Fisheries Plan, and he had a history of pulling the rails of today's MEL, and he requested that he attend the Ordinary General Assembly,

At the Board of Directors meeting held after the Ordinary General Assembly, the three new member companies/organizations were approved. It is the first overseas member of the MEL Council, and (1) ASMI (Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute in the United States), (2) Dongwon Industries (South Korea), and (3) Thai Union (Thailand) are all large

international companies/organization. After the approval, Ms. Akiko Yakata, Japan Marketing Representative from ASMI and Mr. Ki-seok Ha, CEO of Dongwon Japan Co., Ltd., gave powerful speeches. We hope that we can expand the circle of sustainable use of fishery products to the world together.

6. Ambassador Kick-off Meeting was held

The 5th MEL Ambassador Kick-off Meeting was held on May 27th. Of the 10 ambassadors/monitors, 7 participated, including online. Including two participants from the first term, there were also participants from the family (with a child), and it was a very relaxed atmosphere that did not stiffen the shoulders as a member of MEL. All of the

comments from everyone were very useful for MEL management, reflecting their individuality. Thank you very much.

This year, in addition to ambassadors and monitors, we would like to recruit university students as a "MEL cheering squad" to add depth to our network of activities.

7. We will hold the MEL Parents-Children Class again this year

For more information and to apply, please visit this web page.

<https://www.melj.jp/oyakokyouosu2025>



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EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT

This was written in last year's New Year's Eve "Heavenly Voice Language" in the Asahi Shinbun. "When I look back on this year's calamities, I wonder if the whole world has been under a terrible spell, with a series of natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, droughts...

On the other hand, this year seems to be a year of man-made disasters. The principles and claims of leaders across the ocean have upset the world order and norms, and the retaliatory war has spread uncertainty. It is not easy to deal with not only for corporate management but also for social life. However, it is important to remember that man-made disasters can only be solved by people.

This year's rainy season is a hard-and-weak type. Will we continue to experience intense heat and torrential rains? We pray that you will take action to protect yourself.

*MEL Certified Products of the month: Ayu Sweetfish
Certified entities: Ito-Yokado and Mori Yogojo Co., Ltd.*

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