MEL NEWS

MEL certified products ▸

August 31st, 2025

MEL Council

MEL NEWS VOL. 89 (ENGLISH EDITION)

Dear MEL Partners:

As the heat wave continues, economic indicators for January-June are being released one after another.
In terms of "food" figures, the export values of agricultural, forestry and fishery products are 809.7 billion yen, +15.5% year-on-year, and the number of foreign tourists visiting Japan, which supports inbound demand, is 21.52 million, +7.6% year-on-year. In marine products, scallops 35.0 billion yen (+45.4%), yellowtail 25.7 billion yen (+24.6%), pearls 22.2 billion yen (+2.4%), sardines 10.8 billion yen (+36%). It was driven by the top items. This is an increase in exports that cannot be said to be bountiful catches, although it is in line with national policy. However, it is troublesome for consumers.

1. International standardization

CSI (Certified Seafood International), which launched its flag in the United States in April, has decided to hold a seminar in Japan on October 20 and is preparing for it. It seems that it will be closed due to venue restrictions, but participants are already being recruited. Coincidentally, at the same time, ASMI's annual Alaska Seafood Reception, IFFO (International Fishmeal and Fish Oil Organisation) General Assembly, and GFF (Groundfish Forum) General Assembly will be held in Tokyo, bringing together industry people from all over the world. This is the first time that such international conferences on fisheries have been held in Tokyo in one week, and many news will be released. The MEL Council has also received requests for individual meetings and plans to respond.

About the delayed review of GSSI's MOCA approval, the gap between the two sides' arguments has narrowed considerably. However, it is necessary to take another step to finalize the discussion. We will proceed calmly with each other.

2. Certification Validation

In this month, the certification took effect with 1 CoC.

3. Report from the certification holder

This month, we talked to Mr. Kazuhisa Moriya, the representative director, about the commitment of Nikko Maru Fleet, which has formed a group and operates under MEL Fisheries Management Standard (FMS) certification as a member of the Japan Tuna Fisheries Cooperative Association, and Taishin Fisheries, which has obtained CoC certification for processing and distribution.

Commitment to "Nikko Maru pole and line skipjack fishing"

Taishin Fisheries Co., Ltd.

President Kazuhisa Moriya

We agree with MEL's philosophy and have been working to obtain certification since its inception. Currently, "Katsuo Tataki/seared bonito" and "bonito for sashimi", which have obtained MEL distribution and processing (CoC) certification, are gradually being handled as home delivery products by the Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union (Co-op), and are used by many households.

Taishin Suisan Co., Ltd. President Kazuhisa

While the importance of environmental consideration and resource conservation is recognized, we believe that consumption will not last long if we simply buy something because it is good for the environment. The starting point is to make people feel that they want to eat it because it looks delicious or that it was delicious, and from there, we are creating products that will interest people to "what is behind this deliciousness?" I believe that such accumulation will eventually lead to environmentally friendly choices.

All of our products use bonito caught by the historic Skipjack tuna pole-and-line fishing fleets "Nikko Maru" in Omaezaki. The fusion of resource-conscious fishing methods and our processing technology delivers products with excellent freshness and quality. MEL certification has made the background visible, and you can now pick them up with more confidence.

The newly developed "Sea Steak" as a new way to eat skipjack tuna has also completed MEL certification registration since May 2025, and preparations are underway for future development. Although its distribution is limited, it has attracted attention from many quarters, such as winning the Fisheries Agency Director-General's Award, high praise at tasting events, popularity among children, and the adoption of meals by top athletes.

A cooking example of "Sea Steak"

We will continue to promote manufacturing that walks together with sustainable fisheries while focusing on deliciousness and quality, and contribute to the realization of a society in which environmental considerations naturally lead to consumption.

Thank you very much, President Moriya. The "Sea Steak" exhibited at the Japan International Seafood Show held last week aroused the interest of MEL booth visitors. I think there will be inquiries, so please respond.

4. Column of the person involved

Tips for revitalization focusing on coastal fisheries and aquaculture in a series of three times from this month

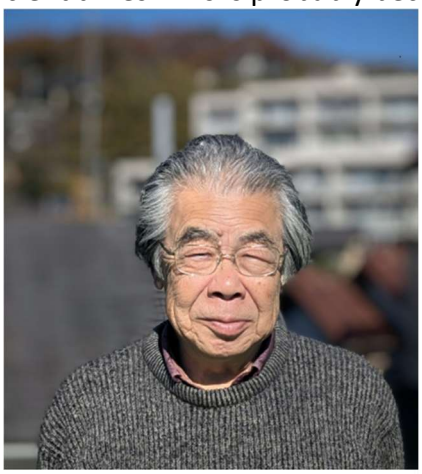
I asked Masahide Inui, the founder of Suitosha Co., Ltd., which is active with the mission of "protecting Japan's fisheries and the sea", and is still a consultant. In March of this year, Mr. Inui published a major book on the economy of remote islands based on a clear field survey called "Fisheries and Livelihoods that Support Island Life" from Ao'e Shobo. It is a masterpiece full of things you see and hear for the first time. I recommend reading it.

"Breeding bivalves learned from scallops"

Senior Advisor, Suidosha Co., Ltd.
Masahide Inui

We Japanese have been eating shellfish that live on the coast of Japan since

ancient times. This is probably because shellfish were easy to catch, delicious, and nutritious. Evidence of this can be seen in shell mounds that remain in various parts of Japan.



Mr. Masahide Inui

Generally edible shellfish are divided into bivalves (Bivalvia) and snails (most of Gastropoda). Bivalves filter/feed on plankton and detritus in seawater. On the other hand, snails can be broadly divided into algae-eating species such as abalone and turban that eat seaweed, and scavenger species such as Japanese babylon and whelk.

Among them, bivalve shellfish are overwhelmingly the most common shellfish we usually eat, both in quantity and type. Asari clams, clams, oysters, and scallops are bivalves that are often seen in supermarkets, but there are many types of sushi, such as bloody clams, Chinese mactra, horse clams, pen shells, Sakhalin surf clams, and egg cockles.

Table 1 shows the long-term trend of shellfish production in Japan. Statistics on eight species of shellfish harvested by fisheries were shown until 2000, but since then, due to low production, clams, Sakhalin surf clams, and ark clams have been grouped into one as "other shellfish".

Shellfish production in fisheries increased from about 300,000 tons in 1960 to about 420,000 tons in 1990 and began to decline, but as of 2023, it is about 360,000 tons, and the total amount has not changed much.

However, if you look at each type of shellfish, there is a big change. Figure 1 shows the change in production volume by dividing scallops and shellfish other than scallops.

Table 1 Changes in shellfish production in Japan Unit: tons

Year	Capture fisheries									Aquaculture				Total
	Abalone	Turban	Asari	Scallop	Clams	Sakhalin	Ark	Others	Sub-total	Scallop	Oyster	Others	Sub-total	
1960	4,390	5,052	102,491	13,870	15,847	5,192	32,895	116,378	296,115	-	182,778	-	182,778	478,893
70	6,466	8,630	141,997	16,477	4,955	4,065	28,276	109,954	320,820	5,675	190,799	-	196,474	517,294
80	4,878	10,243	127,386	83,134	1,910	5,083	1,677	103,574	337,885	40,399	261,323	372	302,094	639,979
90	3,353	9,196	71,199	229,667	2,251	8,010	16,923	77,042	417,641	192,042	248,793	1,486	442,321	859,962
2000	2,146	9,839	33,558	304,286	1,543	8,883	7,308	35,259	402,822	210,703	221,252	1,674	433,629	836,451
10	1,461	7,082	27,185	327,087	44,341				407,156	219,649	200,298	784	420,731	827,887
20	669	4,609	4,305	339,435	32,760				381,778	149,061	159,018	370	308,449	690,227
2023	678	3,775	5,514	330,592	23,553				364,112	151,311	149,064	428	300,803	664,915

Prepared from the "Annual Report on Fisheries and Aquaculture Production Statistics" (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Fisheries)

Shellfish production excluding scallops has been declining year by year from about 300,000 tons in 1970, and has decreased to about 30,000 tons in 2023, which is 1/10. On the other hand, scallops have increased significantly since 1990, increasing to about 330,000 tons in 2023. In other words, at present, about 90% of the total catch of shellfish is scallops, and the remaining about 10% is shellfish excluding scallops. On the other hand, the shellfish produced by farming are oysters, which have a long history, and scallops, which have been actively cultivated since the 1980s. Other shellfish include noble scallops and ark clams, and heart clams that have recently begun to be cultivated, but they are small in quantity. Of the total domestic shellfish supply (fisheries and aquaculture) of 665,000 tons as of the most recent 2023, scallops accounted for 482,000 tons, accounting for 72.5% of the total supply, and the supply of shellfish has lost diversity.

Scallops are a representative seafood product for export, reminiscent of Japan's fisheries industry in the past, but the abalone sold in supermarkets is farmed in Korea, and most of the Asari clams are from China, and the downfall of Japan, which was once said to be a "fisheries powerhouse," is severe.

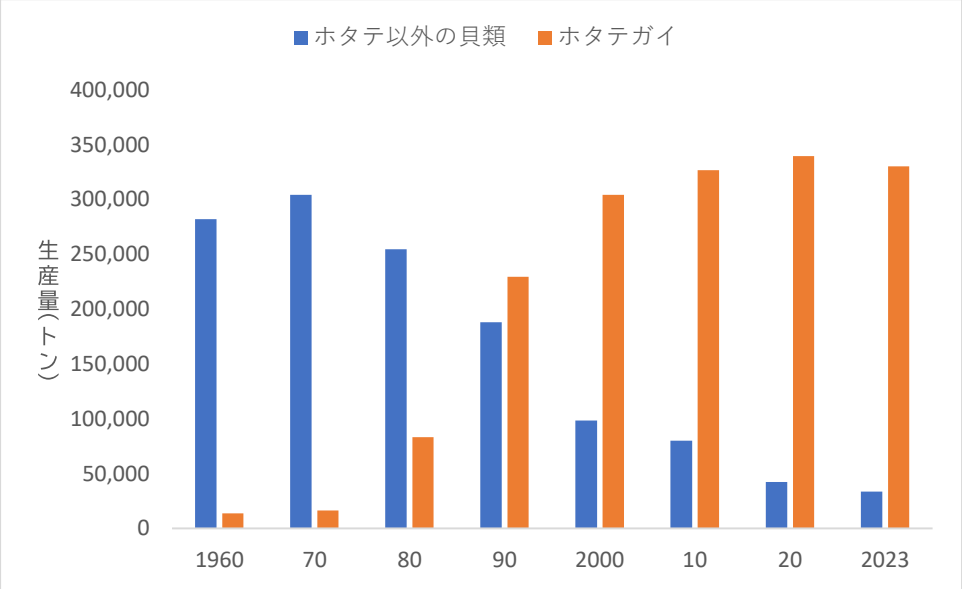


Fig. 1 Changes in fishery production (tons) of scallops (orange) and shellfish other than scallops (blue): Created from Table 1

Bivalves represented by scallops mainly feed on phytoplankton to produce animal proteins. In terms of land, they are like cows and sheeps that eat grass and produce animal protein. In fish farming (feeding aquaculture), which makes fish on bait, the cost of feed accounts for a large part of the cost, but non-feeding bivalves are excellent products that can be produced at a low cost if the basic productivity of the sea area is

well utilized.

The reason why scallop production has increased in this way is that naturally occurring floating larvae are trapped, raised, artificially stocked in artificially compartmentalized fishing grounds, systematically fished by rotation fishing, etc., and raised under artificial management such as exterminating predators, or by hanging them in seawater (scallops originally live on the seabed), contrary to the providence of nature, and under human control. In other words, it is not completely left to nature, but the result of human intervention in nature. Scallops are statistically divided into capture fisheries and aquaculture. The former is catching planted scallops with bottom trawls, while aquaculture is raised by hanging them in the water with baskets or ear-hanging lines, and they are common in that people are involved.

Most bivalves live on sandy mud bottoms (the optimal particle size composition varies depending on species). Therefore, the causes of the sharp decline in bivalve production other than scallops are reclamation, dredging, sea sand collection, inhibition of sand inflow due to the installation of river structures, the occurrence of oxygen-poor water masses due to water pollution, and the increase of predators. It goes without saying that the basis for restoring bivalve production is to improve the coastal environment by eliminating these factors. However, repairing the coastal environment that has been damaged over a long period of time takes time and money. While trying to restore it under a long-term policy, in reality, we will implement successful cases of scallops in each shellfish.

The resource characteristic of bivalves is that fertilized larvae experience a plancktonic stage for a certain period of time, disperse by tides and ocean currents, and in some cases become "ineffective resources." Therefore, the first step in human intervention is to accurately trap the floating larvae that have occurred. In Miyagi Prefecture, which is a representative production area for seed oysters other than scallops, trapping floating larvae has been carried out for many years based on information from research institutions. In addition, in order to quantitatively ensure the occurrence of planktonic larvae, it is important to create a high-density population of mother oysters by aquaculture. Considering the cost, natural spawning is advantageous, but in some cases, it may be possible to produce artificial seedlings in facilities (in Iwagaki farming, Umi Town and other places are building town-run seed production facilities).

The second is to secure the sea surface that can be managed and monopolized by setting up sectional fishing rights or specific section fishing rights, or to use private land that can introduce seawater, such as the site of the former salt pan (the area of the salt pan as of Showa 34 (in 1959) is 4,200 ha). In the Showa 30~40s, when the time when the shrimp farming technology was developed by Motosaku Fujinaga and the

time when the salt pans were abolished overlapped, there were many cases where the abolished salt pans were used as a kuruma shrimp farm. However, since Kagoshima and Okinawa prefectures, which have high water temperatures, have an advantage in shrimp farming, many of the former shrimp farming ponds have been moved and left unattended. In addition, many of the embankment-type Kuruma shrimp farms have been abandoned due to the infection of viral diseases. We can assume the use of these reserved ponds.

The third is securing feed. The feed of bivalves is phytoplankton, and the higher the amount of feed, the faster it grows. In order to increase the basic productivity in a state where there is a lot of feed, nutrients (the three elements of diatom plankton fertilizer are N, P, and Si) are essential. In recent years, environmental administration has been carried out with the aim of creating a "clean sea" (a sea with high transparency), in other words, a sea with little plankton, and advanced treatment (N and P collection) has been carried out at sewage treatment plants. As a result, nutrient levels in coastal areas have decreased, basic productivity has decreased, and Nori farming has become difficult. And the recovered nutrients have nowhere to go, so to speak, useful resources are left alone. The revival of bivalve production requires increasing nutrient levels in coastal areas and revitalizing the "rich sea."

The production area of scallops is mainly Hokkaido. There is a growing division of labor between regions where seedlings of scallops are collected and intermediately cultivated and, and regions where scallops are planted or cultured by hanging methods. Moreover, wide-area collaboration is functioning. The mechanism is supported by the Hokkaido Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations. In order to revive bivalve production, it is essential to have such an organization that is responsible for regional cooperation, management of fishing grounds, and sales promotion.

Scallops are caught in small bottom trawls, but statistics since 2012 have strangely included small bottom trawls in offshore fisheries, even though they are actually coastal fisheries. Offshore fishery production in 2023 was 1.801 million tons, so 331,000 tons of scallop production in the same year is equivalent to 18.4%. On the other hand, the production of sea surface aquaculture in the same year was 852,000 tons, of which 151,000 tons were scallops, equivalent to 17.7%. If we recall that the production of scallops in 1960 was 14,000 tons, it proves that it is possible to dramatically improve production in this way with human power.

Without the knowledge of many people, the production of bivalves except scallops has drastically decreased, Japan's food culture has been lost, and fishing villages have been exhausted. Now is the time to learn from the increase of scallop farming and realize the revival of bivalves, and the success of scallops may show that it is feasible.

However, in response to recent climate change in the fisheries and aquaculture

industries that rely on the natural environment, a mass mortality outbreak of juvenile scallops in Aomori Prefecture and Hokkaido has also experienced a similar outbreak, and it is difficult to completely overcome them by human hands.

By the way, there are only one case each of bivalve shellfish fisheries that have received MEL certification, one for shijimi clams and one for Sakhalin surf clams. In the aquaculture industry, there are only 5 cases of oysters and 1 case of scallops. Although highly sedentary bivalves are currently progressing using scallops, their stock enhancement and management are basically relatively easy, and scallop breeding has proven this. I would like to see MEL certifications in many regions to increase the production of various bivalve shellfish.

Thank you very much, Mr. Inui. Please disclose a part of Mr. Inui's life's work, I received various suggestions. I remembered the gruesome photo of the mouth of the Ashida River in Hiroshima Prefecture, which was once a treasure trove of Asari clams, which was a victim of the construction of a steel mill and securing water supply, which Mr. Inui showed me before.

I am looking forward to the second and third contributions that follow.

5. Japan International Seafood & Technology Expo was held

The 27th Japan International Seafood & Technology Expo was held at Tokyo Big Sight on August 20-22 under the theme of "The Future of Gyoshoku through Communication and Innovation." The organizer, the chairman of the Japan Fisheries Association, Masaaki Edamoto, also had the commitment of the Expo, making it a more fulfilling exhibision.

As the scorching heat continued, the number of visitors over the three days reached about 28,000.

Exhibition of MEL certified marine products, pamphlets, and contact information and consultation corner for certification acquisition

The MEL Council exhibited as a core tenant of the Sustainable Seafood Corner and had a great time interacting with many visitors. In addition, as a new attempt, SANKI SHIRYO KOGYO collected marine residue from each exhibitor's booth and turned it into feed, and waste cooking oil (used cooking oil) was converted into SAF.

6. MEL Certification Awarding Ceremony was held

In conjunction with the Japan International Seafood & Technology Expo, a MEL certification awarding ceremony was held. As a guest at this certification award ceremony, the Fisheries Agency attended for the first time and Ms. Chikage Yoshikawa, head of the certification promotion team greeted. The organizer, Dr. Masayuki Takahashi, chairman of the Japan Fisheries Resource Conservation Association, said, "This is a place where the essence of why MEL is necessary is questioned," and the atmosphere started tensely.

Certificates were awarded to the 12 businesses that attended. From everyone's comments, I realized that "MEL certification is connected to practical works" and reaffirmed the significance of aiming for further fulfilling activities together.

Attendees at the MEL Certification Awarding Ceremony

7. At Sakaiminato City, we proposed to everyone an initiative for "MEL City Sakaiminato"

On August 7th, we held a seminar on regional revitalization using MEL certification, which we have been preparing for for a long time. The editor was appointed as the "Sakaiminato FISH Ambassador" by the Sakaiminato Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and proposed the concept of "MEL City Sakaiminato" to promote the use of sustainable seafood throughout the city in order to make the seafood products of Sakaiminato City, which advocates "the town of Fish and Kitaro", shine brighter.

From time to time, Shigeru Mizuki (deceased) from Sakaiminato won the Eisner Award, which is said to be the Academy Award of the comic industry, and was inducted into the Eisner Hall of Fame, so it is expected to be exciting. It was the first time in Japan that the entire community obtained MEL certification and utilized it, and although it was not easy, I was conscious of creating an opportunity to try it out.

It was widely covered by the local media, and the Sakaiminato Fisheries Promotion Association and the Sakaiminato Chamber of Commerce and Industry took the lead in working on it.

Representative Director Toshimi Ejiri giving a speech after the seminar

(Sakaiminato Fisheries Promotion Association)

. . . . . .

I have the impression that extreme heat, drought, and heavy rain in linear precipitation zones have become the new standard of summer in Japan. There is a myth that if the sea temperature rises by 1°C, the evaporated water vapor will increase by 7% (although I could not review and do not have any scientific basis or source...), but I feel

that the natural cycle in which the increased water vapor falls as torrential rain is somehow easy to understand. Although the forecast accuracy of heavy rain caused by linear precipitation zones that occur frequently has improved, damage is not inevitable, so I would like everyone in the affected area to be careful. I would like to express my sympathy.

It is also understood that the impact is noticeable around Japan, where sea temperature rise is high from the global average. Even if there are various theories about the cause, the wisdom and action of industry, government, and academia are required on how to deal with the rise in sea temperature, which is difficult to artificially manage. It is the "limit of heat" of the 24 solar terms from August 23, but according to the long-term forecast, the high temperature will continue untill September. I wish you all good self-maintenance.

MEL Certified Products of the month: Frozen Oysters
Certified entities: Yamashita-suisan Co., Ltd.

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