



September 30th, 2025

MEL Council

MEL NEWS VOL. 90 (ENGLISH EDITION)

Dear MEL Partners:

Even in the hottest summer in the history of observation, as expected, the signs of morning and late autumn finally began to drift through the Higan (the week of the equinox). Will the season deepen with each rain from now on?

On the sea, the Japan Meteorological Agency announced at the end of August that the Kuroshio Great Meander ended in 7 years and 9 months, the longest in history since its occurrence in August 2017. I am concerned about the impact on fishing for coastal whitebait and offshore species such as bonito, saury, sardines, squid, etc. While the abundant catch of saury has been reported positively as positive news, production adjustments have been triggered due to the ability of the land side to accept fishing for the first time in 13 years. By the way, 13 years ago, in 2012, the catch was 218,000 tons. There is a forecast of poor fishing, and I hope that autumn salmon, which is concerned about the fishing pattern at the start, will continue to be like saury.

1. International standardization

On September 5, the GSSI Secretariat pointed out by a benchmark committee member that "the MEL regulations when the certified seafood contained in the product is less than 95% of the "Mixed Regulations for Certified and Non-Certified Seafood" in the Logo Usage and Management Regulations are not in accordance with the GSSI Benchmark Tool. I was informed that the benchmarking committee has decided to provide provisional approval considering MEL's claims (the meaning of the provisional approval is to correct the discrepancy between the text of the guidance and the component text related to 95% in the revision of the benchmarking tool starting this year, and to provide sufficient discussion with the addition of scheme owners, including MEL, in the future). The final recommendation of the application for approval from the board of directors has been made, and approval is expected to be obtained in September. It was significantly delayed from the schedule for completion in April, but it will be a tentative settlement. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to everyone involved for their support.

In the future, we will communicate with the owners of friendship schemes such as CSI to create an environment where MEL's claims are recognized.

2. **Certification Validation**

This month's certification took effect for 1 aquaculture and 2 CoCs.

In aquaculture, KS Foods in Minamisanriku-cho, Miyagi, became the first company to receive MEL certification for land-based coho salmon aquaculture. We look forward to their further development.

3. **Reports from MEL certified businesses**

This month, Shuhei Iwamoto, Managing Director of Mt. Fuji Salmon Co., Ltd., which obtained aquaculture certification in July, expressed his enthusiasm for the initiative.

"To connect the 100-year-old traditional aquaculture to the next 100 years"

Fujisan Salmon Co., Ltd. Managing Director Shuhei Iwamoto

On July 23, 2025, Fujisan Salmon Co., Ltd. obtained MEL certification. What we



Mr. Shuhei Iwamoto

focused on in obtaining this certification was the visibility of production management. In addition to fish management, we focused on establishing a comprehensive management system that includes equipment, facility, and human working styles.

Symbiosis with the environment is an important theme. Our company is an old-fashioned free-flowing farm that receives the blessings of nature and raises. This free-flowing aquaculture is an inland water aquaculture that has been going on for more than 100 years in Japan, and it is a fishery that continues quietly mainly in mountainous areas. While having this tradition, we meet various

current global standards for aquaculture and cultivate high-quality salmon that can be shipped all over the world. Although it is basic, we ensure the control and transparency of numerical values, such as thorough control of feeding rates and water quality inspections. In employee training, in addition to visualizing work through on-the-job training, human resource development utilizes external professional human resources.

Implement the results. On the premise that both fish and people are healthy and safe, we are promoting the creation of a sustainable aquaculture system.

In addition, we have developed and implemented our own production management app to further improve production management. Operational efficiency is improved by recording feeding and shipping amounts, water temperature, weather, inventory levels, etc., and reflecting the voices of the field. The accuracy of the numbers has also improved, and information sharing among staff has become smoother, making it possible to increase public holidays. Information is shared at regular online meetings every Monday, and manuals and to-do lists are prepared and disseminated throughout the company. We are working to create a system that allows anyone, including employees from different industries, to understand and execute their work.

The pillars of our approach are traceability and sustainability. We value clarifying information from production to distribution and providing fish that consumers can choose with confidence. As part of this, a fresh fish transportation company has set up a system to pick up goods from the farm every day in a refrigerated vehicle. This allows us to connect "from the farm to the market" through a consistent cold chain, and deliver products to all parts of the country while remaining fresh and safe.

For exports, we do not sell directly overseas at this time, but we deliver them to North America and Asia through intermediaries. In March of this year, we participated in the Boston Seafood EXPO as a member of the Toyosu Export Partnership Council, where we exhibited and tasted our "Fnujisan Salmon" and "White Fujisan Salmon" along with Japanese fish. Along with sushi culture, the quality of Japan's fish has been highly evaluated, and we feel a solid response. Overseas, aquaculture certification is a prerequisite, and I strongly felt the need to obtain it. If a system is established that allows certification to reach consumers in one fell swoop, we believe it will have great significance not only for exports but also for domestic sales.

As a brand, our goal is to grow the world's number one sashimi grade salmon that is safe, secure, and the world's most delicious, and to cultivate Japan-flavored salmon for the next 100 years in Japan's climate. It is of great significance that we were able to obtain certification in the process of taking on this challenge, and we will continue to promote shipment and sales activities using MEL certification. We will continue to take on challenges and deliver that value both domestically and internationally through certification.

Thank you very much, Mr. Iwamoto. I remember President Izumi Iwamoto's passionate message at the certification ceremony held in conjunction with the Japan International Seafood & Technology Expo in August. I hope that MEL certification will be of use to you.

4. **Column of the person involved**

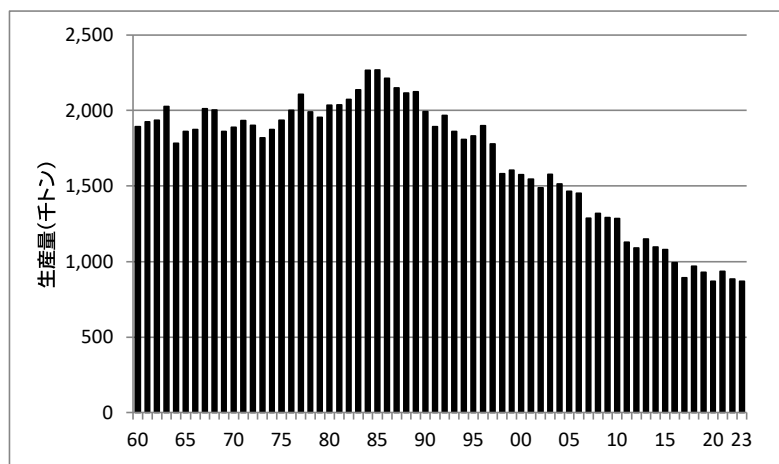
Continuing from last month, this is the second article by Mr. Inui, the founder and senior advisor of Suidosha Co., Ltd. You can feel Inui's approach as his life's work.

"Declining Coastal Fisheries Production and Changes in Coastal Ecosystems"

Masahide Inui (Senior Advisor, Suidosha Co., Ltd.)

Coastal fishery production, which had been almost consistently stable at around 2 million tons after the war, fell below 2 million tons in 1990 and has been declining since then, falling down a slope (Figure 1). By the way, in the late 1980s, it exceeded 2 million tons during the abundant fishing season of sardines.

In 2023, the most recent year for which statistics are released, despite the recovery period of sardines, it reached 871,000 tons, the lowest since the end of World War II. During this period, the number of fishermen has decreased significantly, largely due to the fact that fishing has become an unprofitable industry due to the decrease in the target resources of coastal fisheries.



**Fig. 1 Trends in coastal (capture) fisheries production in Japan
from 1960 to 2023 (one thousand ton)**

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

As mentioned in the previous issue, "Increasing the cultivation of bivalves learned from scallops," only 6.5% of Japan's shellfish fishery production (excluding aquaculture) is shellfish production other than scallops. Abalone, which was once exported as dried abalone, is almost devastated in western Japan, and Asari clams have also plummeted to about 1/30 of their peak season. In addition, the Japanese

hard clams are already only very locally distributed, and the overwhelming number of ocean-going clams you see in supermarkets are the sea clams.

In crustaceans, the production of Kuruma prawns is barely supported by the release of seedlings, and the production of small shrimp such as Southern rough shrimps and crabs such as Japanese blue crabs has also decreased significantly. In addition, the number of mantis shrimps that should be "resistant to pollution" due to increased resources in eutrophic waters has also decreased significantly in recent years.

On the other hand, in the Seto Inland Sea, the number of octopuses has decreased significantly in recent years. It has continued to decline from about 12,000 tons in 2000 and has fallen to 2,000 tons, about one-sixth of it in 2023. In addition, the octopus, which was caught a lot from Harima Nada to Bisan Seto, has drastically decreased and is on the verge of disappearing.

Squid, which is composed of local groups in the region, is not caught nationwide, and it has become impossible to catch it altogether. In addition, chum salmon, which is a great success in cultivation fisheries, has declined sharply in recent years, mainly along the Sanriku coast, and has greatly exhausted the local economy.

White salmon is a coastal resource due to its strong return to the natal river, and all other species are highly sedentary. Let's look back at the reasons for the decline in these sedentary resources.



The scenery of drying octopus once seen in various parts of the Seto Inland Sea

The significant decline in bivalves is probably due to the loss of habitats due to the reclamation of tidal flats and shallow areas in the estuary area, which were

their habitats, and the thinning of the sand supply due to the construction of river structures. The catastrophic decline of gastropod abalone and tokobushi in various parts of western Japan is due to the loss of large seaweed as food due to long-term and widespread rocky-shore denudation. There is no point in releasing seedlings where there is no food, and the devastation of coastal ecosystems has reduced gastropod resources. The occurrence of rocky-shore denudation is believed to be caused by the long-term establishment of algae-eating fish such as rabbit fish and brassy chub as the water temperature rises, and the seaweed has been eaten up. It has been proven that large seaweed can grow if food damage is prevented by cages and nets, so it is not impossible to regenerate large seaweed if the resource level is reduced by reducing food pressure, that is, by actively utilizing algae-eating fish. Like abalone and tokobushi, sea urchins are declining sharply in various parts of western Japan, and the cause is the disappearance of large seaweed, which is their food. The loss of seaweed bed ecosystems has taken away expensive aquatic resources.

The cause of the decline of shrimps, blue crabs, and mantis is the same as that of bivalves, and in addition to the decrease in tidal flats and shallow areas, the lack of oxygen caused by the lack of oxygen in the holes formed by dredging and other causes of oxygen deficiency during the stratification period seems to have a major impact. The impact of pesticides used on land cannot be ignored. Neonicotinoid insecticides, which have already been partially banned in Europe, are still used in Japan, and the highly water-soluble pesticides eventually end up in the ocean. This has the same effect on crustaceans belonging to the same arthropod phylum as insects, causing the death of insects. The fact that sea roaches, which used to crawl around in large numbers near the beach, have completely disappeared in some areas in recent years strengthens the suspicion of pesticides.

In recent years, rising water temperatures have had a favorable effect on "migratory octopus," and octopus stocks are increasing in the Tohoku region. Despite the fact that the recent rise in water temperature is favorable for octopus, the sea octopus resources in the Seto Inland Sea, which are "sedentary," have decreased significantly. By the way, the feed of common octopus and webfoot octopus is crustaceans and shellfish. Octopus feed in the Seto Inland Sea has decreased significantly in recent years, and a positive correlation between feed biomass and octopus catch is clear (Fig. 2). From this, it is suspected that the decline in common octopus and webfoot octopus in the Seto Inland Sea may be rooted in changes in the marine ecosystem that cause feed to disappear.

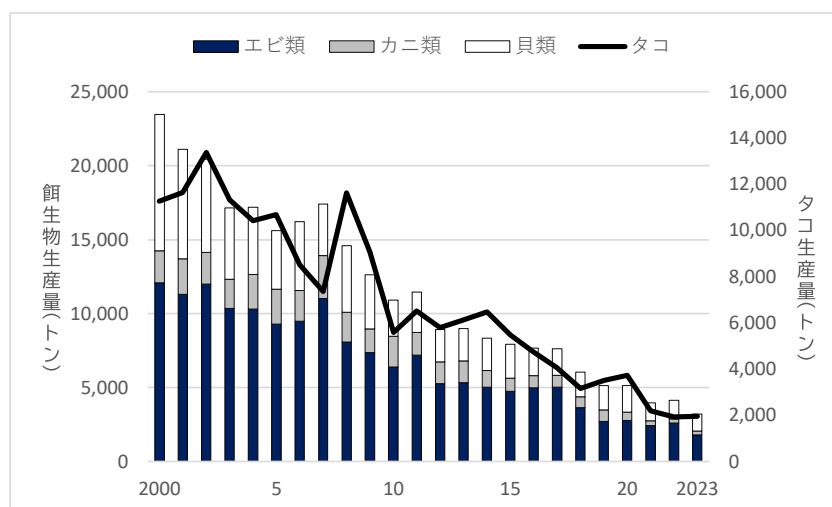


Fig. 2 Relationship between octopus and food production (ton) in the Seto Inland Sea:
black boxes, shrimps; grey boxes, crabs; white boxes, shellfish; black line, octopus
 (Prepared from the Annual Report on Fisheries and Aquaculture Production Statistics
 (Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries))

It is generally explained that the decline in sand lance stocks in the Seto Inland Sea and Ise/Mikawa Bay is due to the prolongation of the summer hibernation period due to rising water temperatures, while the decline in basic productivity due to the decrease in nutrients in recent years causes poor maturation of brood stock before summer hibernation. On the other hand, the cause of poor fishing for the Joban, Tsugaru, and Hokkaido groups is not well understood. In addition, with regard to chum salmon, especially in Honshu, there are almost no rivers where fish can be able to swim naturally upstream, and there are concerns about the impact of the long-term repeated production of artificial seedlings by catching chum salmon returning to the natal river in the estuary area. Calls for the revival of wild salmon that can spawn naturally are gradually growing.

As mentioned above, the reason for the significant decline in coastal fishery resources in recent years is that changes in the environment and ecosystem of coastal areas have a major impact. Sedentary resources such as shellfish, which are fishing species with joint fishing rights, are managed by organizations centered on fishery cooperatives, and efforts have been made to use resources sustainably. However, today's situation is no longer a major problem that goes beyond the scope of fishers' efforts alone. In order to revitalize and rebuild coastal fisheries, it can be said that cooperation between a wide range of stakeholders, including many consumers, companies, governments, and research institutions, is required.

Thank you very much, Mr. Inui. I recognize that the points you pointed out are the most important issues that MEL, which advocates "fisheries eco-labels originating in Japan," must address. This is why I asked Dr. Nobuyuki Yagi to write in May, Dr. Yutaro Sakai in June, Dr. Eiji Tanaka in July, and Mr. Inui in August, September, and October. We hope that the series will be especially useful to coastal fishers.

5. Event related

On September 10-12, MEL participated in Seafood Expo Asia 2025, which was held in Singapore for the same period last year, at the call of the Japan Fisheries Association, with the aim of disseminating sustainable initiatives for Japan's seafood to the world.

This year, as a Japan team because JETRO's Japan Pavilion has canceled its exhibition. Although we felt a little lonely, 16 organizations and companies set up booths, including the Japan Scallop Export Promotion Association, the Japan Farmed Fish Export Association, and the Kochi Seafood Export Promotion Association, led by the Japan Fisheries Association and the MEL Council. At the MEL booth, we introduced the GSSI's recognition and others, and Takahashi Shouten in Yaizu, which was a joint exhibitor, provided a tasting of "Pole and Line Fishing Bonito Tataki", which received a positive response from visitors. we hope it develops into a future deal.

Overall, while there are concerns about tariffs on exports to the United States, the attitude of businesses to develop new export destinations was strongly felt. we also realized that awareness of certified marine products is spreading.



MEL description to buyers



Promotion of "Ajinokakunoya" (Hachinohe Kanzume Group) scallop (MEL certified product)

On the 25th and 26th, we exhibited for the first time at FOOD STYLE JAPAN 2025 held at Tokyo Big Sight together with the Japan Fisheries Association. This year was the 20th commemorative event, and it was a grand event using Halls 4-6. It was an exhibition for restaurants and related industries, and we were conscious of the opportunity to have contact with restaurants, an industry that MEL has not been able to penetrate. We received a response from visitors that exceeded expectations.

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On September 5, Hidenori Nagaoka, Executive Director of the Japan Fisheries Association, passed away suddenly. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to many people for attending the wake, and funeral and farewell ceremony. We would like to express our respect for Nagaoka's contributions to the industry over the years and thank you for your support during this time.

We will continue to incorporate Nagaoka's thoughts and do our best with the MEL Council, so we look forward to your continued support.

*MEL Certified Products of the month: Sea Steak
Certified entities: Taisin-suisan Co., Ltd.*

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