



MEL NEWS

MEL certified products ▶



December 31st, 2025

MEL Council

MEL NEWS VOL. 93 (ENGLISH EDITION)

Dear MEL Partners:

We realized that "there is no strong person who is better than nature" at the end of the year. Since the end of last month, the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP30) has been followed by the Conference of the Parties to the Washington Convention and important international conferences.

As the effects of global warming spread, it has been pointed out that the serious lack of catching for autumn salmon and the mass deaths of oysters in the Seto Inland Sea may have crossed the "critical point." On the other hand, the EU's proposal to list all eel species in Annex II (commercial transactions are possible, but an export license issued by the exporting country's government is required) was rejected at the Conference of the Parties to the Washington Convention, but Japan, a major eel consumer, faces a severe challenge that cannot be said to be relieved. From MEL's standpoint, we hope that efforts will continue to be made to restore natural resources and that artificial seedlings will be put into practical use as soon as possible.

1. International standardization



Public Statement of Continued GSSI Recognition Marine Eco-Label Japan

26 November 2025

HAARLEM, The Netherlands, 26 November 2025 – The Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI) is pleased to announce the continued recognition of the Marine Eco-Label (MEL) Japan program following the successful completion of the Monitoring of Continued Alignment Process, as outlined in the GSSI Benchmark Procedures.

In last month's issue, we reported that the approval of MEL's Monitoring of Continued Alignment (MOCA) is expected to be next year, but GSSI managed to get it done before the Christmas holidays and announced MEL's MOCA approval on November 26th.

In the midst of turmoil in the secretariat due to the resignation of the CEO, I would like to thank you for your support.

2. Certification Validation

Unfortunately, there were no new certifications that took effect this month. There are several certification procedures in progress, so we will do our best from the new year.

3. Report from the certification holder

Although it was a bad timing for this year's autumn salmon fishing to end with a record low catch of fishing, Mr. Shinji Fujimoto, who is in charge of fisheries, processing, and sales, showed his thoughts on fisheries in the North Okhotsk Sea.

"Set net fisheries are a fishery that Japan can be proud of in the world"

Fujimoto Fisheries Department Representative

Representative Director of Okhotsk Katugyo Co., Ltd.

Shinji Fujimoto

I wanted to use this expression in the title, so I looked up how many sustainable fishing methods such as set nets exist in the world. Then, although set net fishing methods exist around the world, it was found that Japan's set net fishing is one of the most systematized, sophisticated, and complete fisheries in the world in that it is a production system that integrates fishing methods, resource management, and local communities. The autumn salmon (chum salmon) set net fishery approved by the governor of Hokkaido has a history of 100 years, and Hokkaido's fishers, private breeding organizations, research institutes, and the government work together to maintain and stabilize salmon resources through hatching and release projects, and are linked to processing and distribution. Due to the influence of global warming in recent years, the stock of salmon, which is a cold-water fish, is in a difficult situation. In such a situation, I

think it is important to convey to consumers that the autumn salmon set-net fishery is making various efforts to use resources sustainably through eco-labels, and that the fishing method itself is friendly to the earth, and to have them support it.

In the North Okhotsk region of Hokkaido, where we operate, the main fisheries are scallop fisheries with rotational harvesting and seedling release, hairy crab basket fisheries that implement a allowable catch system to protect resources, and autumn salmon set net fisheries that have been sustained along with the artificial hatching and release project. I believe that if



Okhotsk Katugyo Co., Ltd. President
Shinji Fujimoto

MEL certification is extended to these fisheries, it will increase the interest of processors and distributors and contribute to the branding of the region.



Autumn salmon with MEL certification logo of Katugyo in Okhotsk

In 2012, Fujimoto Fisheries Department, the parent company, obtained producer-stage certification for small-scale set-net fisheries and autumn salmon set-net fisheries, and Okhotsk Katugyo obtained distribution and processing stage certification. Furthermore, in 2014, the autumn salmon set net fishery of the Soya Branch of the Hokkaido Set Net Fisheries Cooperative Association obtained producer-stage certification, and the Esashi Fisheries Processing Industry Cooperative Association obtained distribution and processing stage certification. The purpose of our certification is that various fish species that migrate seasonally are caught alive, are easy to maintain freshness, and the fishing grounds wait for fish that migrate close to the port to catch them, so that consumers can know the wonders of set net fisheries, which are friendly to the sea and resources, and to support efforts to manage resources and make effective use of resources. In addition, we believed that it is important for producers and processors and distributors to work together, and that it can also be an opportunity to work together to promote the seafood brand of the region. That feeling has not changed even now.

I feel that local fish species caught in set-net fisheries in various regions can still contribute to MEL's activities of "bringing the bounty of Japan's rich seas to the world." Kasube, a member of the cold-water rays caught in northern Hokkaido, is also a fish species that is considered to be an industrially useful species due to stable resources. We hope that local fish species in each region will also be investigated and studied for resource assessments, and that through the new MEL, local fish will be properly utilized

for the rest of the world, and that it will bring benefits to everyone involved in the fisheries industry.

Thank you very much, President Fujimoto. The desire to add value not only through fishing but also through processing and sales was clearly conveyed. Hokkaido's fisheries products are treasures not only for Japan but also for people around the world. I hope that everyone involved will work together to protect and nurture them. Of course, MEL will do our best together, so please feel free to contact us.

4. Column of the person involved

Continuing from last month, this is an article on aquaculture by Dr. Masashi Maita, Vice President of Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology. Finally, we got to the core.

"Aquaculture production and eco-Label certification-2"

Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology

Vice President Masashi Maita

The purpose of eco-label certification is to "recognize the importance of responsible and sustainable aquaculture production that takes into consideration the protection of natural resources, conservation of the environment, and consumer trust, and to evaluate efforts to achieve this, thereby contributing to the promotion of appropriate aquaculture production."

As a necessary requirement for establishing a sustainable aquaculture production system, let's first consider "seedlings." The MEL aquaculture standard requires the use of artificial seedlings in principle. At present, the use of natural seedlings is only allowed for yellowtail that has been evaluated as a resource and is considered to have a high level of resources. The reason why artificial seedlings cannot be introduced for yellowtail is that there have been problems with deformity and growth using artificial seedlings in the past. I hope that the problems related to the deformity and growth of artificial seedlings will be solved by the progress of research on seed production technology, but I would like to ask you to consider actively considering the benefits of using artificial seedlings and introducing them instead of hesitating to introduce based on past experience. Since the harvesting time for natural seedlings is fixed, the time to introduce seedlings at farms nationwide is almost the same. I think that it is possible to build a production system that can be profitable under a new production plan that has never been seen before, by adjusting the production time of seedlings and inducing them into the farm at a different time from natural seedlings by adjusting the production time of broodstock maturity. In recent years, rising sea temperatures have become a problem.

The development of technology to produce seedlings that are resistant to high water temperatures through breeding will also be an advantage of using artificial seedlings. In addition, crossbreeding (hybrids) with a fish species grow at high water temperature and another species with fast-growing and good meat quality and triploid seedling production will also be a means to bring about new aquaculture management strategies. By the way, seedlings and seedlings that have been manipulated by chromosomes, such as hybrids and triploids, comply with the certification standard 4.3.3, "Do not use genetically modified organisms that have not been properly assessed for environmental risk as seedlings for aquaculture." In addition, the use of artificial seedlings avoids the risk of parasites derived from natural seedlings, so together with feed management, it is possible to export for raw food consumption to the EU. In this way, it may be necessary to focus on the possibility of devising an unprecedented production system that will lead to the continuation of aquaculture production while responding to changes in the aquaculture environment in the future by making full use of artificial seedling production technology.

For "feed," from the MEL Aquaculture Standard Ver.2.0, restrictions were set on the use of moist pellets. We are looking for a conversion to solid compound feed as a sustainably usable aquaculture feed. In order to protect natural fish stocks, it is necessary to reduce the amount of fishmeal and live bait used as a source of protein for feeding in many farmed species, but moist pellets have limitations. Of course, plant proteins such as soybean protein, which is used as an alternative protein source, may not be a stable source of protein for a long time. In the future, a production system for aquaculture feed that artificially reproduces the food chain, such as phytoplankton, zooplankton, and planktrophic fish, may be necessary. However, until that technology is developed, I think a realistic approach would be to turn unused resources such as processing residues and urban waste, including food waste, into feed (as an alternative to fishmeal). In this case, the bottleneck is the certification standard 4.2.3, "The protein source contained in the feed must not be of the same species or genus as the aquatic animals and plants that are raised." Many people believe that there is currently no scientific basis to prohibit the use of protein sources of the same species and genus in farmed fish. If GSSI's benchmarking tool removes this requirement, we believe that the use of unused resources such as processing residues and municipal residues, including food waste, will increase and contribute to stable feed. If such a review is made, I expect that it will become a standard that is easier to work on.

Thank you very much, Dr. Maita. I will do my best to share the suggestions from the professor with the business owners. Thank you for your continued support.

5. **Events**

November 18 At the annual general meeting of the International Coalition of Fisheries Associations (ICFA) held in Rome, Italy, Mr. Akimoto from the MEL Council attended as a member of the delegation of President Edamoto of the Japan Fisheries Association. As part of MEL's activities, we reported on the promotion of industry-supported eco-label activities in cooperation with CSI.

In addition, at the ICFA/FAO Information Exchange Meeting on the 19th of the following day, it was pointed out that the FAO Technical Guidelines prohibiting the use of raw materials of the same species and genus in fish feed hindered the utilization of residues generated from seafood processing and consumption. FAO expressed its intention to consider it when reviewing the guidelines.

On December 20th, we held a MEL parent-child class at the communication space of Toyosu Market Uogashi-yokocho. In a collaboration event with "Yumeichi Rakuza", a project to support the reconstruction of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Noto Peninsula Earthquake, children were asked to make Christmas cards, and parents were asked to learn about fisheries eco-labels using MEL introduction videos by Mr. Sakahiko, who serves as a MEL ambassador. It was a small handmade event by MEL staff, but it was well received by the participants.

6. **Extraordinary General Meeting (written) and 44th Board of Directors Meeting (written)**

With the approval of the MEL Council Board of Directors held on November 25, a general meeting (written) was held to elect a successor to the late Director Hidenori Nagaoka. All members approved Katsunori Hirai, Executive Managing Director of the Japan Fisheries Association, as a director of the MEL Council. Director Hirai was elected as the Senior Executive Managing Director of the MEL Council at the subsequent board meeting (in writing) and took office on the 22nd December. As a result, the absence of the MEL Council as an Executive Director and the Chairperson of the Standards Committee has been resolved and has returned to normal.

Thank you very much for your support to all members and certified holders.

7. *Kanoya Fishermen's Cooperative Association's MEL certified amberjack was exported to Australia for the first time.*



Kanoya Fishermen's Cooperative Association has an amberjack MEL aquaculture certification Ver.2.1, but we received a call that it has been decided to export to Australia using MEL certification as a leverage. It was said to be 5 tons of frozen fillets, and it was also published in Minami-Nippon Shimbun on December 6th.

The Kanoya Fishermen's Cooperative Association is working on a three-year plan to switch from moist pellets to solid compound feed for amberjack, and we hope that exports will get on track.

Winter-type weather continues with high pressure in the west and low in the east. With the flu epidemic, the inside of public transportation cargos is becoming a parade of face masks.

The year of the *kino-tomi* (wood snake), which was difficult, was only one week left. I have a feeling that the coming year of the *hinoe-uma* (fire horse) will be even more severe, but I hope that we will do our best together so that we do not succumb to the pressure.

We wish you good health and a good New Year's holiday.

MEL Certified Products of the month: Amberjack

Certified entities: Kanoya Fishermen's Cooperative Association

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