



January 31st, 2026

MEL Council

## MEL NEWS VOL. 94 (ENGLISH EDITION)

Dear MEL Partners:

*It's late, but I would like to express my New Year's greetings. I would like to congratulate you on welcoming the new year "Hinoeuma (Fire Horse)" in your plans.*

*A year full of uncertainty has begun, which major media outlets describe as the "era without charts." The global cooperative system that started with the first oil crisis more than half a century ago is now completely collapsing. In an era where major powers are unstoppable in their nationalism, I would like to continue my steady efforts together with you to maintain a sustainable society that protects the global environment, oceans, and resources at the beginning of the year.*

### **1. International standardization**

*Following the completion of the GSSI Monitoring of Continued Allignment (MOCA) for MEL certification at the end of November last year, it was announced that the MOCA processes for ASC certification and MSC certification that GSSI had been conducting since December 2024 were completed on December 10 and December 16, 2025, respectively. At the end of December 2025, MOCA completion was completed in four schemes (CSI, MEL, ASC, MSC).*

### **2. Certification Validation**

*This month, the certification took effect with 1 CoC.*

*Unfortunately, the measures taken against misconducts in fisheries certification and CoC certification, which we reported in the November issue of MEL News, have been terminated.*

*Regarding fishery certification, in the Minoshima Shirasu Boat Trawl Fishery of the Kii Channel Central Motor Vessel Boat Seine Cooperatives, some business operators were arrested and prosecuted by the Japan Coast Guard for operating outside the permitted area, and certification has been suspended since December 2025. Based on the results of the special audit by the certification body, the Cooperatives has applied to terminate its certification. Approved by the certification body, the certification ended on December 26, 2025.*

Regarding CoC certification, Happy Foods Co., Ltd. was instructed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to provide corrective guidance and implement measures to prevent recurrence due to a violation of the labeling of autumn (chum) salmon flakes (pink salmon mixed with raw materials), and a special audit by the certification body was conducted and non-conformity was pointed out. Although the certification has been suspended since December 2025, the non-conformity pointed out by the certification body have not been resolved, so we are currently in the process of terminating the certification by the certification body.

In both cases, the MEL Council has determined that there is a "significant risk to the reliability of the scheme" in the revision of the requirements for certification bodies approved by the Board of Directors in November, and supports the decision of the certification body in the next action following the suspension of certification in December 2025.

### **3. Report from the certification holder**

This month, we asked Shinya Saito, sales manager and processing plant manager of the Iheya-son Fisheries Cooperative Association, a producer of the co-op sustainable "seasoned mozuku" introduced in the header and main article, to contribute to the article.

#### **"With the beautiful sea of the island"**

**Iheya-son Fisheries Cooperative Association  
Sales Manager and Processing Plant Manager  
Shinya Saito**

On Iheya Island, an inhabited remote island located in the northernmost part of Okinawa Prefecture, about 40 km north of the main island of Okinawa, there is an Iheya-son Fisheries Cooperative Association. The island is surrounded by beautiful coral reefs



**The beautiful waters of the island**



**Harvest scenery of mozuku**

with a population of about 1,000 people, and about 30 producers are involved in mozuku farming, and about 800 tons of mozuku are landed annually.

Seventy to eighty percentages of the landed mozuku is processed by Marine Products Kimuraya Co., Ltd. in Tottori Prefecture and handled by the Co-opdeli Consumers' Co-operative Union.

In obtaining MEL certification this time, we received a proposal from the Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union, and after discussions at the Mozuku Subcommittee of our cooperative, we decided to work with Marine Products Kimuraya Co., Ltd. to obtain MEL certification.

We have a long relationship with the Co-opdeli Consumers' Co-operative Union, but especially since 2010, we have been working on an initiative called the '**Churashima Support Project**' for the purpose of protecting the environment of Iheya Island and interacting with production areas.



Churashima support project sticker

In this initiative, 1 yen for each purchase of products using Iheya mozuku will be donated to the "Churashima Support Fund", and the donation will be used for activities to protect the beautiful sea and sandy beaches of Iheya Island, which are essential for mozuku farming.

A total of more than 20 million yen (ca. 130 thousand USD) has been received so far, and more than 300 union members, including other people, have visited the island to interact with producers and cooperate in cleaning up drifting garbage on the coast.

We are extremely pleased that obtaining this MEL certification has confirmed that our mozuku is produced with consideration for the environment, and that this will provide even greater peace of mind to consumers who are helping to preserve the environment of Iheya Island by purchasing our mozuku.

With the acquisition of MEL certification, we would like to further verify and improve our environmentally friendly mozuku farming methods and our efforts to protect the environment through mozuku production, in order to protect the environment in which mozuku production can continue indefinitely. Also, since it is a certification, we would like to consider selling Mozuku overseas in the future. We would also like to work together with producers to expand new sales channels, realize sustainable income

improvements for mozuku producers, and ensure that mozuku farming will continue to be an attractive industry that will not be troubled by successors in the future.

*Thank you very much, Mr. Saito. At the MEL lecture held in Sakaiminato in August last year, I met Mikio Kimura, president of Marine Products Kimura Kimuraya, and we had a great time talking about Okinawan mozuku. This year marks 30 years since Iheya-son and Sakaiminato-shi began exchanges, and on the 23rd, as part of mutual exchanges, 12 fifth graders from Iheya Elementary School visited Sakaiminato and observed the processing of mozuku under the guidance of President Kimura. The editor is a FISH ambassador for Sakaiminato, so I was doubly happy to accept it. As for the inner circle, the wife of the MEL Council Secretary General Katoh (living in the Tama area) reported that it was purchased at Co-opdeli immediately.*

*On this occasion, I pray for the further development of the Iheya-son Fisheries Cooperative Association.*

#### **4. Column of the person involved**

*This month, we will publish the third part of the aquaculture edition, which we have asked Dr. Masashi Maita, Vice President of Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology, to write. This article concludes the series.*

#### **"Aquaculture production and eco-label certification"**

**Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology  
Professor Masashi Maita**

I will continue about the feed. As mentioned in the previous article, the use of moist pellets was restricted in the MEL aquaculture standard Ver 2.0, but it has established standard for allowing the use of moist pellets as an exception. In the standard, there is the use for the purpose of adjusting and improving the quality of the product. I think that the quality that is evaluated in the current distribution of aquaculture products is premised, but is the quality of farmed fish produced only by solid compound feed really not to the taste of consumers? I think that the quality of farmed fish can be controlled in various ways by adjusting the ingredients of solid compound feed. If we re-examine what quality consumers want, I think that different production methods and distribution forms will be born. As a result, it may lead to a reconsideration of the inevitability of having to use moist pellets.

In order to achieve sustainable aquaculture production, it is necessary to reduce the load on the sea, which is the place of production, and the water environment, which is an important factor in aquaculture production, and maintain good conditions. Protecting

the environment of the broad aquatic sphere (not only the ocean, but also freshwater bodies such as rivers and lakes) is not only to maintain the health and productivity of the target species farmed there, but also to protect the social responsibility of aquaculture producers with a burden on the aquatic environment, which is a common property of the entire nation. Only by fulfilling social responsibilities without being bound by prioritizing economic objectives can aquaculture products be accepted by the public (consumers), and the significance of continuing aquaculture production will expand. In this sense, it may be said that it is a basic principle common to the four principles of the MEL aquaculture standard.

It is expected to switch to land-based closed circulating aquaculture as a method to reduce the burden on the marine environment and conduct aquaculture production sustainably. In addition to reducing the burden on the marine environment, land-based closed circulating aquaculture also has advantages such as ensuring food safety, improving productivity through stable environmental adjustment, and combined aquaculture such as aquaponics.

There are still major cost issues such as electricity bills and facilities, and I think it is limited to aquaculture species that can absorb costs due to the selling price of the product. There is also the idea of entrusting the entire life cycle of the farmed species to the land-based closed cycle system, but I think that even if a part of the life cycle of the farmed species is carried out in the land-based closed cycle aquaculture system that is worth the production cost, the burden on the marine environment will be reduced compared to the conventional production method. The MEL aquaculture standard is designed to be applicable to such land-based aquaculture.

The declining birthrate is facing us as a reality. In a society where the working population is declining, I believe that the significance of aquaculture production to stably meet the demand for seafood products that supply animal protein will increase more than ever. In this case, what is required is labor-saving in aquaculture production and creating added value based on the experience (data) of our predecessors. In order to save labor and improve the efficiency of work, the introduction of engineering methods such as IoT technology and robot technology will be essential. In addition, AI will be very powerful in creating added value based on experience (data). When a part of the work is reduced and improved by introducing equipment, it is necessary for them to operate normally and perform at their intended capacity. Therefore, for example, an increasing number of producers are introducing systems that notify producers of water quality monitoring results in conjunction with IoT devices, but from the perspective of production management, it is important to check and maintain the equipment to ensure that it is functioning properly. Therefore, daily inspections of equipment, maintenance

procedures, and records are important evaluation perspectives in the MEL aquaculture certification.

I think the aquaculture industry needs to incorporate engineering technology and go beyond the framework of the primary industry. Such innovations do not come from improvements based on traditional production methods. These days, I feel that the question of whether conventional methods are the best and the creation of new value that is not bound by conventional methods will determine the future of the aquaculture industry.

*Thank you very much, Dr. Maita. It was taken as a suggestion to change the awareness of the scheme owner, the MEL Council, certification bodies, and aquaculture operators. As the aquaculture industry is already moving beyond the boundaries of primary industry, and as we respond to the movement for social responsibility, we will share the challenges with all parties involved. We look forward to your continued guidance.*

*Thank you for your continued guidance.*

#### **5. Okinawa Mozuku was released in the Co-op Sustainable series**

*Starting with the mozuku produced by the Okinawa Iheya-son Fisheries Cooperative Association (MEL aquaculture certification came into effect on May 20, 2025), a series of supply chains have been completed to be processed by Marine Products Kimuraya Co., Ltd. in Sakaiminato City, Tottori Prefecture (CoC certification took effect on May 8, 2025), and sold by the Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union and the Co-opdeli Consumers' Co-operative Union under the Co-op Sustainable Series.*

*I am pleased to see that the implementation of the fisheries eco-label in society is progressing step by step. It is also the revival of MEL-certified products in Okinawa Prefecture. I respect everyone involved for their collaboration.*

From the CO/OP press release **(January 7, 2026)**

The Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union and the Co-opdeli Consumers' Co-operative Union release the first product with the MEL logo mark in Okinawa Prefecture's mozuku ~ Receiving MEL certification for mozuku from Iheya Island in Okinawa Prefecture, the product packaging has been switched ~

Following the Iheya-son Fisheries Cooperative's "Okinawa Mozuku Sea Farming" receiving MEL aquaculture certification\*, the Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union and the Co-opdeli Consumers' Co-operative Union will gradually switch their mozuku products, including the currently available "[CO-OP Iheya Island, Okinawa Prefecture Seasoned Mozuku with Rice Black Vinegar](#)," to

packaging with the MEL logo, and sell them as **Co-op Sustainable** "protecting aquatic resources" products.

MEL certification: An internationally recognized fisheries eco-label certification system from Japan. A system that certifies fisheries and aquaculture that are carried out in an environmentally friendly way such as aquatic resources and ecosystems.



CO/OP Okinawa Prefecture Iheyu Island seasoned mozuku < with rice black vinegar > new package

## 6. The Ainan Fisheries Cooperative Association's MEL-certified red sea bream is active in on-site classes

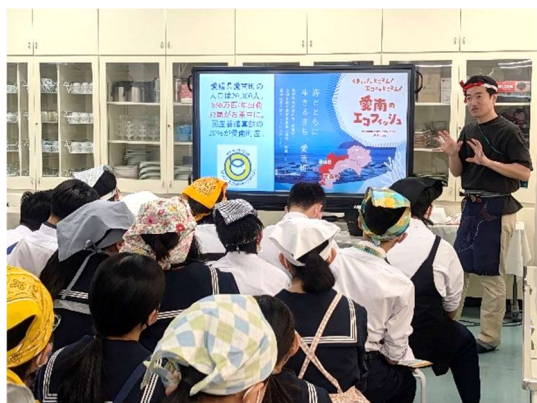
On January 15, the Fish Food Promotion Center of the Japan Fisheries Association held a "Sea Bream Shiogama-yaki Cooking Class" at a junior high school in Tokyo, with Tadatashi Hayatake, the head of the section, as a lecturer. In order to use the Ainan Fisheries Cooperative Association's MEL-certified red sea bream, MEL's manager Keisuke Akimoto also participated. This project has been carried out by the Fish Food Promotion Center since 2017, and more than 1,000 students have experienced cooking and tasting sea bream in salt pot this year.

On the day of the event, it was held in two classes in the morning and afternoon for the first year of junior high school. After the cooking explanation, the students were divided into 6 groups, and each group actually touched a whole sea bream, used a spoon to remove the scales, took the gills and internal organs with scissors, wrapped the washed red sea bream in salt, and put it in the oven ([click here for how to make it https://osakana.suisankai.or.jp/shokuiku/7906](https://osakana.suisankai.or.jp/shokuiku/7906)). During the grilling, lectures were given as classroom lectures on how to eat fish without wasting it, fish nutrition, feed, resource management for fishers, eradication of IUU fishing, and fisheries eco-labels.

The grilled sea bream salt pot is broken with a mallet and tasted by each group. Comments such as "It's so delicious!", "It's so soft!", and "It's fluffy, warm and

*delicious!" were heard from each table. I heard many people say that it is completely different from the fish they usually eat, that it is completely different from the fish they ate in school lunches when they were in elementary school, that they don't usually like fish, but that the fish is very delicious, and I realized that if students eat delicious fish, they will love fish even more. At the end, the groups finished eating all.*

*We would like to thank the Ainan Fisheries Cooperative Association for their cooperation.*



**Cooking class**

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*While we were being swayed by the turmoil of the world, January came to an end in the blink of an eye. It's the exam season. I can't help but want to say "Do your best!" to the nervous examinees who will be the protagonists of the next era.*

*The new year of the fisheries industry began with the Japan Fisheries Association New Year's greeting party on the 6th, but I hope that we will have a fulfilling year with everyone with the highest fisheries budget ever and nature such as the elimination of the Kuroshio Great Meander. Thank you for your continued support this year.*

**MEL Certified Products of the month: Mozuku seaweed**

**Certified entities: Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union, Co-opdeli Consumers' Co-operative Union, Iheya-son Fisheries Cooperative Association, and Marine Products Kimuraya Co., Ltd.**

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