



February 28th, 2026

MEL Council

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Dear MEL Partners:

It's already spring on the calendar. The "first day of spring" is being observed in various places, but the situation in the world remains harsh winter, and it seems that we are in the midst of the chaos of an uncertain era.

Japan's seafood exports for 2025, announced on February 3, were 423.1 billion yen, 17.2% higher than the previous year, a record high. Amid headwinds such as the U.S. tariff issue and China's opposition to China's remarks on the Taiwan contingency, the performance of scallops and yellowtail, which have attracted people around the world, has stood out. Do your best! Japanese seafood and marine products.

1. **International standardization**

The original plan was for the GSSI's first quarter board meeting to be held in Boston in March, but it has been changed to coincide with the annual scheme owner meeting (SOAG) in Barcelona in April.

The MEL Council is preparing for the participation of Secretary General Katoh. At present, MEL and CSI will work to finalize the succession of mutual recognition of CoC certifications signed with CSC in Boston, and in Barcelona, we will further work to promote the revision of the GSSI benchmark tool "Prohibition of feeding of the same species and genus for aquaculture" in the GSSI benchmark tool, which MEL continues to strongly advocate for at the Scheme Owner Advisory Group, with the support of CSI and other foreign schemes.

2. **Certification Validation and Termination**

This month, there was one CoC certification in effect.

The certificate awarding ceremony scheduled to be held at the venue of the Seafood Show Osaka on February 25-26 has been canceled due to the lack of attendees. The next event will be held in conjunction with the Japan International Seafood & Technology Expo (Tokyo).

Regarding the number of certifications, we have summarized the latest status of certification validity, suspension and termination.

Details of the number of certifications (as of the end of December 2025)

Type of certification	Number of initial certifications	Termination of authentications	Number of valid authentications	Partial certification terminated, suspended, temporarily suspended, or in the process of termination
Fisheries	27	3	24	9
Aquaculture	93	24	69	3
CoC	208	22	186	5
Total	328	49	279	17

Reasons for termination or suspension of certification

	Number of Cases
No longer expected to be used or no longer needed	15
Resource status and raw material shortage	14
Suspension and termination of business	12
Authentication Consolidation and Migration	11
Moist pellets cannot be used	4
Burden of maintenance costs	3
Others*	7
Total	66

Trends in Certification Termination and Suspension

Year	Number of Cases
2021	2
2022	7
2023	14
2024	16
2025	27
Total	66

*Termination of suppliers' certifications, violation of laws and regulations, resignation of the person in charge, outbreak of illness, etc.

3. *Report from the certification holder*

As I reported in the December issue of MEL News, I asked President Mitsuru Minakura to report on the situation on the occasion of the first export of amberjack with MEL certification from the Kanoya Fisheries Cooperative Association to Australia.

"About the acquisition and utilization of MEL certification by Kanoya Fisheries Cooperative Association"

Kanoya Fisheries Cooperative Association
Representative Director
President Mitsugu Minakura

At the Kanoya Fisheries Cooperative Association, we have been engaged in the aquaculture business of flounder, yellowtail, and mainly amberjack. The annual production volume is 3,000 tons, and the amount is 4.5 billion yen. Amberjack has been certified as a brand fish of Kagoshima Prefecture in 2007, and has been working



Kanoya Fisheries Cooperative Association, Mitsugu Minakura, President

on farming flounder and yellowtail since then. In aquaculture, we have continued to devise feeding methods and types of food while pursuing deliciousness, as well as the safety and security that has been required for a long time.

The reason for working on MEL certification began with the idea of providing food as an ingredient for the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. In addition, since the aquaculture industry is in a competitive environment, there was also a desire to promote the safety, security, and deliciousness of farmed fish such as yellowtail and flounder with "Kanoya Amberjack" as the main focus, and to

increase added value and promote sales.

Under such circumstances, in February 2020, we were able to obtain MEL aquaculture certification for amberjack, yellowtail and kingfish, and the certification made it possible to appeal overseas. In order to develop a processing plant and sell products that meet



"Kanoya Amberjack" exported to Australia

their needs, we established a new processing plant and obtained CoC certification. By creating an environment that will lead to such export promotion, we will continue to put even more effort into the export of amberjack.

As for the export business, the association is mainly focused on

amberjack, so it is struggling while yellowtail exports are ahead. With the support of Kagoshima Prefecture and Kanoya City, exports to Taiwan, Thailand, and other countries are carried out every year, but the export amount in FY 2024 was only been about 1 million yen.

In the midst of these efforts, a non-Japanese trading company with a strong sales system in Australia placed an order on the condition of "MEL certification" and "frozen products", and it was decided to adopt "Kanoya Amberjack" while proceeding with business negotiations.

Australia is one of the few markets outside the United States that has purchasing power, and it is a multicultural country that handles a wide variety of food products. Until now, Australian farmers produced kingfish (a general term for yellowtail, mainly Hiramasa in Japanese) and sold it for domestic consumption and export to other countries, so the hurdles for Japanese yellowtail to enter the market were high. However, production has become unstable due to recent environmental changes (high water temperatures), and the demand for yellowtail is increasing. In addition, the high awareness of the environment and sustainability among the purchasing base and the high interest in certifications such as MEL have led to the conclusion of this business negotiation.

Exports of about 5 tons were realized in December 2025, and further business negotiations with mass retailers and fishery wholesalers are scheduled to be held locally in March 2026. Continued trading of MEL-certified fish "Kanoya Amberjack" is expected. We feel that this export to Australia could not have been established without MEL certification, and we would like to continue and utilize MEL certification in the future.

Thank you very much, President Minakura. We are pleased to announce the first export of "Kanoya Amberjack" to Australia. As a scheme owner, I am happy that MEL certification is helpful. Let's continue to do our best together to further expand exports.

4. Column of the person involved

This month, I posted an article with Hideki Miura, managing director of the All Fisheries Federation. We apologize for the timing of the writing (August 2025) and publication (February 2026) due to editorial reasons, and that the numbers are not up to date.

"We will use MEL certification to deliver the world's best fish to the world."

National Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations

Managing Director

Hideki Miura

○ The potential of Japan's fisheries industry

Considering the spread of MEL certification, an eco-label originating in Japan, I would like to first check what characteristics the Japanese fishery industry has. First, Japan is surrounded by the sea on all sides, and the surrounding waters are one of the world's three largest fishing grounds, and a wide variety of seafoods are caught using various fishing methods. The Japanese food culture that has developed around fish food has become a major asset and attraction of Japan, which has been recognized worldwide as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The second is a highly developed fresh fish distribution system. Seafood landed on the beaches is transported to all parts of the country the next day or the day after and can be eaten raw such as sashimi and sushi. This fresh fish distribution system centered on the production area market is a great treasure of Japan, which is unique in the world and cannot be imitated by any attempt in the world, and has become a great strength in export and inbound demand.



National Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations: Hideki Miura

And thirdly, the characteristics of Japan's fisheries. Unlike other countries, Japan catches a wide variety of marine seafood and catches them using various fishing methods such as stationary, longline, bottom trawl, and purse seine, and the value and price of the same fish vary greatly depending on the fishing method, freshness, and processing method. In this way, Japan's fisheries and fisheries industry has great potential that is unparalleled in the world, and foreign tourists from all over the world are now flocking to Japan to eat Japan's delicious sashimi, sushi, and other seafood products, and export and inbound demand are increasing year by year. The export value of seafood products reached 390.1

billion yen in 2023, a record high, and the number of inbound visitors exceeded the pre-pandemic level by 29 million in the same year, and in FY 2024, the number reached a record high of 39 million, 10 million more than the previous year. The number of Japanese restaurants overseas became about 190,000 in 2023, an increase of 3.4 times over the past 10 years. In addition, according to a survey by the Japan Tourism Agency, the number one unchanged purpose for foreign tourists to visit Japan is "eating Japanese

food (≡ fish food)". The JF Group believes that the way to live for Japan's coastal fisheries is to make effective use of the characteristics and potential of Japan's fisheries to deliver the world's most delicious fish, including inbound demand, not only in Japan but also around the world, and to increase fishery output and improve fishers' incomes by strengthening sales capabilities through added value.

○Efforts to improve fishery production value

I would like to check the trend of fishery production value here. Japan's fishery output, which was 2.7 trillion yen around 1990 at the beginning of the Heisei era, has continued to decline since then, falling to 1.3 trillion yen in 2020, but began to rise in 2021 and has recovered to 1.7 trillion yen in 2023, the same level as 2002 20 years ago. Fishery output per capita has increased from about 10 million yen in 2020 to about 14 million yen in 2023, and fishing income has increased from about 4.7 million yen in 2020 to about 6.3 million yen in 2023.

The JF Group aims to revitalize fishing village areas by improving fishers' incomes, and is promoting the "Beach Vitality Revitalization Plan" (abbreviated as the "Beach Plan") to increase fishers' incomes by more than 10% in five years, but since 2021, the proportion of districts that have achieved the income improvement target of the Beach Plan has also begun to increase. We believe that efforts to improve added value through freshness maintenance and branding through the Beach Plan, which is being practiced at nearly 600 beaches nationwide, have also contributed to the increase and recovery of this output.

To give an example of value-added improvement measures, for example, efforts to maintain freshness, such as Ikejime on board and draining blood, are being carried out in 231 districts nationwide. In addition to maintaining freshness, there are various efforts to improve added value, such as devising feed for farmed fish and introducing a single-seed method for oyster farming, but I believe that the granting of added value by obtaining MEL certification is an effective initiative to clearly show that seafood products are produced by sustainable fisheries and aquaculture. In particular, as interest in sustainable fisheries and aquaculture is growing in countries around the world, overseas buyers are also seeking certification, and as mentioned earlier, the labeling of fisheries eco-labels is an effective tool in delivering the world's most delicious fish to the world. Under such circumstances, as stated in a column by Professor Yagi of the University of Tokyo in the May issue of MEL News, "We have established certification standards that can legitimately evaluate Japan's unique fisheries management efforts, and we have negotiated with GSSI, an international organization, to obtain recognition for these certifications."

Mr. Miura, thank you very much. The thoughts of the National Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations, which unites the fisheries of the whole country, overflowed between the lines and resonated in my heart. As for the MEL Council, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to National Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations for its various support as a board organization from the beginning. As a council, we hope to be of further help to National Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations and the fishers of the JF Group, who are taking a leap forward in the world through their activities.

Thank you for your continued support.

5. Call for opinions on MEL fishmeal and fish oil certification standard and compound feed certification standard started

The draft MEL certification standard related to compound feed for fish farming, which was under development, has been finalized, and we have started soliciting opinions for 60 days from January 30th. The original draft is posted on the MEL website.

In parallel, we will proceed with the decision of the certification body, the preparation of requirements for the certification body, the training of auditors, etc., and the final draft will be prepared by the standards committee with reference to everyone's opinions, and after the decision of the certification body, it is envisaged that the certification standard will come into effect after consulting with the board of directors and the ordinary general assembly scheduled to be held in June. Since the actual operation as a certification standard will start after the certification body is accredited, it is expected to be after 2027, and necessary preparations such as briefings for businesses will be made during this period.

Development began in September 2020, and the development was approved at the regular general assembly in June 2022, and with everyone's cooperation, we were finally able to solicit opinions.

We think there are still mountains to overcome, but we will do our best together with everyone involved to contribute to the realization of the policy of "making aquaculture a growth industry."

6. MEL Auditors' Training Conducted

On February 12-13, we conducted a auditors' training (CPD training). This time, it was held online, but together with eight training participants, we shared the latest information on the world's fisheries eco-label system, which is moving greatly. This training focused on the parts of MEL certification that were scarce and group work, and we strongly felt that everyone was seriously working hard. MEL is promoting a variety of new initiatives as one of the schemes at the center of global movements, and CPD

training is an important opportunity for auditors to retain the latest information and skills.

Currently, MEL has 75 auditors in 8 fisheries, 6 aquaculture, and 17 CoCs, 7 designated instructors in fisheries, 17 aquaculture, and 27 CoCs, and 33 fisheries, 39 aquaculture, and 26 CoCs. As MEL's international presence grows, we strive to provide training content that contributes to high-quality screening.

7. MEL Advisory Board

We had an advisory board meeting on February 10th. Of the six committee members, five people including Professor Hiroyuki Matsuda, the chairperson, participated, and we were able to share a meaningful time.

This is the 10th time that the advisory board meeting was held, and the content has been enhanced year by year with accurate suggestions from members who are active in this world. In particular, discussions were heated on important issues such as (1) how to deal with GSSI and CSI from the perspective of promoting internationalization and strengthening their influence on the world, and (2) how to revise the requirements for certification bodies regarding the suspension and termination of certification and how to proceed in response to scandals that are considered to be "serious risks related to the credibility of MEL."

We will reflect the suggestions they have given us in the future management of MEL.

8. Standards Committee Held

On February 19, the Standards Committee held a certification review based on GSSI standards and MEL Management and Operation Regulations regarding the revision of the MEL CoC certification standard, as well as the CoC certification Ver.3.0.

After active discussions, the original draft of the Expert Subcommittee and the MEL Secretariat was revised, and the revised draft was approved in the future, and it was decided to start soliciting public comments in March. Initially, in order to improve the usability of the current certification standard, we considered dividing the CoC certification standards into three categories: "wholesale", "processing", and "retail", but we concluded that by dividing the guidelines for auditors into three areas under the new certification standard Ver. 3.0, we will be able to respond to Japan's sophisticated distribution and meet the purpose. As for the certification standard Ver.3.0, we aim to take effect after consulting with the board of directors and ordinary general assembly scheduled to be held in June, but it is expected to take time due to the necessary procedures before it can be put into actual operation.

9. MEL Monitor Campaign

We would like to report that we have carried out a MEL monitor campaign using Instagram and it was very popular.



◆ Campaign Period

January 14, 2026 (Wed) ~ January 28, 2026 (Wed)

◆ Monitor Products

Sunrise Farm Co., Ltd. "Morning Series"

- Boiled radish for the morning shime yellowtail
- For pickled rice bowls for the morning shime yellowtail
- Avocado Poki for the morning shime yellowtail

◆ Effects

MEL Followers 3,774 → 4,184 +410

Total number of applications: 478 (Number of selected applicants: 15)

It had the largest number of applicants and a positive response among the monitor campaigns we have conducted in the past. From the comments of the applicants, they were attracted by the word "morning shime yellowtail", and "it looks delicious" and "I want to try it" seemed to be the source of popularity.

In this year's tasting monitor campaign, we selected monitor products based on the fact that they are products that can be purchased online, etc., and that they are as easy to eat as possible, and many comments were received that they were grateful that the "Morning Shime Yellowtail Series" could be eaten just by thawing it.

Through the tasting posts of the winners, we hope that the awareness of MEL certification will be raised and the appeal of the "Morning Shime Yellowtail Series" will be conveyed to more people.

We would like to thank Sunrise Farm Co., Ltd. for their cooperation.

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The MEL Council Secretariat is packed at the venue of the Seafood Show Osaka today and tomorrow, and this month's issue of MEL News is sent from the Seafood Show venue. Direct conversations with MEL certified exhibitors and many stakeholders who visited the exhibition are valuable sources of information, and their voices are always useful for MEL's activities.

For the MEL Council, the milestone year of the 10th anniversary of the founding of the MEL Council has already passed two months. The MEL Status Report (January 2026 edition) is being distributed at the Seafood Show Osaka venue, so if you are unable to participate this time but are interested in seeing it, please contact the MEL Secretariat. We will deliver it.

The exciting Winter Olympics have ended, but infectious diseases are raging in various places. In order not to lose to the performance of dynamic athletes and dangerous infectious diseases, let's do our best together to meet the expectations of the world.

MEL Certified Products of the month: Green laver

Certified entities: Maruei Sato Seafood; Soma-Futaba Fisheries Cooperative Association

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