



March 31st, 2026

MEL Council

MEL NEWS VOL. 96 (ENGLISH EDITION)

Dear MEL Partners:

In the midst of the cherry blossom news, the spread of war, which is almost unlike sports events such as the Paralympic Games, sumo wrestling, WBC, and selected high school baseball in full bloom, has been echoing in daily life. As far as we can learn from history, the expansion of the war seems to be a factor that leads to the decline of the countries involved.

For a generation that experienced the absurdity of war even slightly in childhood, the daily news reports are heartbreaking. Even though he boasted that "there is no war, I will end it," he re-appeared on the mound, but it seems that he will be TACO again. Otherwise, it will become a quagmire. How do you deal with the overconfident runaway that everyone will give in if you threaten them with force? The courage, insight, and execution of the leaders of each country are being tested.

1. International standardization

Secretary General Katoh visited SENA (Seafood EXPO North America) held on March 15-17. Although there is no MEL exhibition, we talked about mutual recognition of CoC certification with CSI. Since it involves not only scheme owners but also certification bodies and accreditation bodies, we will return to the original idea of the MOU agreement with CSC and aim to finalize it as a mechanism that will help each other's work in Barcelona on April 21-23.

The GSSI Board of Directors appointed Gert le Roux on 1 June to the post of Executive Director (reverting from the name of CEO previously used to the original Executive Director). Gert le Roux has been a member of the GSSI Board of Directors since 2023 and seems to have an understanding of the work. After obtaining a Master's degree in Livestock Industry Management: Aquaculture from Stellenbosch University in South Africa with, he spent the last six years as Head of Seafood Sustainability Assurance System at Woolworths, South Africa's largest retailer. We hope that this will finally bring the GSSI work back to normal.

2, **Certification Validation**

This month, there were two CoCs in effect. There are 18 cases under consultation, but the number of new cases into effect remains low.

3. **Report from the certification holder**

Mr. Yusuke Sato, Director of the Sustainability Strategy Department of Umios Co., Ltd., who is currently attracting attention from the world, wrote about it.

"Acquisition of MEL certification as a solution"

**Umios Corporation
Sustainability Strategy Department
Director Yusuke Sato**

On March 1, 2026, we changed our company name from Maruha Nichiro to Umios. The company name Umios reflects our determination to solve global social issues through food as a "one" with our stakeholders, society as a whole, and the earth, starting from our roots in the ocean "u mi". As with the progress of global warming, the disruption of ecological balance, and the global food crisis, the depletion of natural seafood resources is a major social issue, and we believe that it is our responsibility to directly address this issue for the Umios Group, which has enjoyed the benefits of the sea and nature since its founding.

There are various methods and measures to solve the social issue of depletion of natural seafood resources, and one of them is to actively handle certified seafood products that are internationally recognized as sustainable. There is a wide variety of



**Sustainability Strategy Department,
Umios Corporation: Yusuke Sato, Director**



seafood products in circulation in the world, and while many of them are unstable and will be depleted as they are, there are also certified seafood products that are internationally evaluated as sustainable. If the proportion of certified seafood products in the world increases in circulation, the proportion of seafood products with unstable resource status will decrease. The idea is that if the number of consumers who support sustainable seafood increases, the demand for seafood with unstable resource status will decrease, and the amount of catch and distribution will also be reduced, leading to the conservation of resources. In other words, we believe that actively handling certified seafood products is one way to solve the problem of depletion of natural resources.



The state of the Life sales floor

One of the certified seafood products is MEL certification. We believe that delivering protein sources that were born in Japan and have obtained internationally recognized MEL certification and have been certified as sustainable seafood products to consumers will make Japan's seafood distribution sustainable and help respond to the food crisis. We obtained MEL certification in May 2025 and started handling MEL-certified products from farmed baby scallops in Aomori Prefecture. Although there is only one fish species handled and the amount handled is not large, we would like to increase the number of fish species and the amount handled in the future.

Although our handling of MEL certification has just begun, there are many certified people in Japan who share the same thoughts. We would like to co-create with you and develop a sustainable fishery industry, so we look forward to your continued support.

Thank you, Director Sato. I was invited to the opening ceremony of Umios on March 25th and felt my whole body with enthusiasm.

We would like to sincerely congratulate Umios on its wonderful start and hope to work together to further expand sustainable seafood.

4. Column of the person involved

We have decided to cover CoC certification three times starting this month. We will ask Professor Naotomo Nakahara at Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology who is a member of the specialized subcommittee of the CoC Certification Standards Committee, to summarize and process the entire product, and Kazuhiko Kotani, who presides over the Otani Food Business (former Ito-Yokado, who is committed to popularizing fish food as a "fish kataribe" appointed by Director-General, Fisheries Agency) will write the retail article.

"A Chain of Trust Spreading from a Chain of Management Responsibilities - An Evolving MEL CoC"

Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology Professor Naotomo Nakahara

The term "Chain of Custody" is now known to some extent as CoC certification, but it may not necessarily be a familiar expression. I don't remember when I first came across this word, but I think I had the impression that it was somehow difficult to understand or rigid. However, this term originally originated from the idea of treating evidence as genuine in judicial proceedings, and it can be said that it is a natural concept with rather rigidity in the sense of chaining management responsibilities.



**Tokyo University of Marine Science and
Technology
Professor Naotomo Nakahara**

The basic idea of the CoC in the fisheries eco-label is the same. Supply certified seafood products to consumers without mixing with non-certified seafood products. It is a system in which management responsibilities are handed over along with the movement of certified seafood products among certified businesses in the chain. Therefore, at all stages of distribution and processing, from acceptance to storage, processing, shipping, and sales of certified seafood, it is required to prevent mixing with non-certified seafood, confirm the consistency of incoming and outgoing

volumes, and keep records, and the system will be confirmed. The MEL CoC has also been developed based on this international institutional structure. At first, the development was carried out with reference to the internationally popular system, and since then, various explorations have continued as it has been put into operation. Here, I would like to check this search from two perspectives.

First, one of MEL's defining characteristics is its "Made in Japan" perspective. As you know, Japan's seafood distribution is characterized by multi-stage distribution from the production area to the consumption area, small quantities and multi-variety transactions, short lead times mainly for fresh seafood, and many small and medium-sized businesses in distribution and processing companies. These characteristics create considerable operational difficulties in meeting the requirements of the CoC. This includes the need for certification by many constituents to ensure the authenticity of a supply chain, the easy subdivision of management units due to the daily fluctuation of small and high-mix lots, and the resulting increase in the burden of management.

On the other hand, in Japan's seafood logistics, unique relationships of trust have been formed through the intensive exchange of information in the wholesale market, where fish, people, and money gather, transactions based on detailed information on origin and quality, and strict product management with an emphasis on freshness. Considering the ideal certification method suitable for the field of seafood distribution in Japan can be said to institutionalize the system that has formed such trust in a way that can be confirmed by a third party. Certification providers have been taking measures to confront such difficulties and clearly demonstrate their management responsibilities, and at the time of writing, the MEL CoC certification standard ver.3.0 is being considered for a more appropriate way of reviewing.

The second is the perspective of "connection with the world". MEL certification has been recognized by GSSI, and the entire system has reached the level of international standards. Among them, CoC certification plays an important role in maintaining the reliability of certified seafood throughout the supply chain and connecting it to the next stage. It can also be said that the CoC proves the reliability confirmed as a scheme at the actual site of distribution, processing, and sales. In the process, we have persistently reconciled the differences between overseas systems and standards and the actual situation in Japan, and this is still the case.

In addition, as the seafood market becomes more internationalized, the CoC plays an important role in delivering overseas certified seafood to the domestic market or domestic certified seafood to the global market. The CoC has the meaning of a mechanism that can ensure the authenticity of certified seafood across borders and as a bridge between markets. Currently, MEL is proceeding with the mutual recognition process for CoC certification with CSI (formerly CSC/RFM system) in the United States.

The global expansion of the handling of certified seafood by CoC certified companies through such a move is not only the expansion of the sustainable fisheries business, but also the expansion of the channels for delivering Japanese certified seafood to the world.

In this way, MEL CoC has evolved while searching for a better system between the characteristics of Japan's seafood distribution and compliance with international standards, and this is currently progressing. While responding to various issues, we are trying to create a system that connects management responsibilities, as well as a system that connects trust in the supply chain and further connects the markets of Japan and the world. The word CoC itself may not always be familiar now, but that's okay. Along with the chain of management responsibility and trust formed as the MEL CoC, we expect that the chain of initiatives that share MEL's philosophy will steadily expand.

Thank you very much, Dr. Nakahara. The MEL Council is working to upgrade the version of the standard as CoC certification becomes the main body of MEL certification in terms of the number of cases, and the functions that connect production and consumption are expanded and subdivided into "wholesale", "retail", "processing", and "food service". Under the guidance of the professor, we hope that the new version will be an easy-to-use standard with the keywords "management responsibility", "supply chain trust", and "connecting the Japanese and global markets".

I would like to ask Dr. Nakahara for your continued guidance.

5. We exhibited at "Seafood Show Osaka"

On February 25-26, we exhibited at the Seafood Show Osaka sponsored by the Japan Fisheries Association held at ATC Hall in Osaka. As usual, MEL certified products were exhibited as a core exhibitor in the MEL corner, and MEL certified companies Dainichi, Marui Shoten, and Takahashi Shoten, who have obtained MEL certification, set up booths in the corner.

What stood out as a trend this year was that instead of appealing to visitors about the contents of the exhibition, active exhibitors were notified to relevant parties and encouraged to come. Many exhibiting companies, including OUG Holding, were working hard, and although the weather was rainy, the number of visitors exceeded last year.

Many people came to the MEL booth, and there were many certification holders who were able to set up their own booths, and we were able to exchange a wide range of information.

The seminar was crowded with aquaculture-related topics, including land-based aquaculture. We realize that interest in land-based aquaculture is spreading to non-fisheries industries, and the number of visitors to MEL booths is increasing from companies and organizations that have no track record in fisheries.



Seafood Show Osaka MEL booth

6. MEL Ambassador Graduation Ceremony

On March 10th, the 5th MEL Ambassador Closing Ceremony was held. Currently, 9 MEL Ambassadors are helping MEL spread to society in various situations, and 6 of them attended and shared the latest information. In the new fiscal year, new members will be added and activities will begin in May.

At the closing ceremony, following the recent report on the current situation of MEL, the results of the menu proposals of the ambassadors using mozuku from Iheya Island in Okinawa, which were reported in the January issue of MEL News, were announced. The first place was "Mozuku Pancake", the second place was "Mozuku Hamburger", and the third place was "Mozuku Cooked Rice". All of them were proposals that broke preconceived notions about Mozuku. The target of the votes was MEL followers, and although it was an inner competition, it was exciting. Recipes and comments are posted on the MEL Instagram account.



左：沖縄伊平屋島産のもずく 右：1位となったもずくチヂミ@odamari841, @sumimayu作

Mozuku from Iheya Island;

The First Place: Mozuku Pancake



左：2位のもずくハンバーグ@usuzukuri_nocchi作
 右：もずく炊き込みご飯@ririkankan, @aomino_eat_fish作

The Second Place: Mozu Hamburger; The Third Place: Mozu Cooked Rice

.....

The number of births in Japan in 2025 (including foreigners) announced by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare last month is 706,000, and it has become a serious topic that the declining birthrate is progressing at a pace 17 years faster than the "Future Estimates" released by the National Institute of Population and Social Security in 2023.

In the streets, even if barbershops recruit people, there are no applications at all, and it happens that customers have to make reservations half a month in advance, and the aftermath of labor shortages is making life cramped. We would like to think and act together on what we can do for the new era.

MEL Certified Products of the month: Japanese basket clams
 Certified entities: Jusan Fisheries Cooperative Association

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