

June 30th, 2026

MEL Council

MEL NEWS VOL. 99 (ENGLISH EDITION)

The preliminary results of the national census have been released, and the reality of Japan's full-scale era of population decline is once again shaking society. Japan's population (including foreigners) is 123.05 million, a decrease of 3.1 million from the previous survey. By 2025, the number of births is expected to reach 670,000, and the total fertility rate is 1.14, both setting new record lows, indicating that securing manpower on the fields will become increasingly difficult.

Population decline has become a global issue, and even India, the most populous country, has a total fertility rate of 1.98 (2023), with a predicted population decline in the near future. In China, which ranks second, the population by 2025/2000 is expected to decrease by 0.7%, and the total fertility rate will be 1.00, indicating serious declining birthrates and aging. Even Indonesia, which provides a large workforce to Japan, is still a young country with a population of 290 million (the fourth largest in the world) and a median age of 30.7 years (compared to Japan's 49.9 years). However, with a population growth rate of 0.76% and a total fertility rate of 2.08, yellow lights are flashing for the backers of tomorrow's fisheries field.

1. International Standardization Related

We received a notification from the GSSI Secretariat regarding MOCA (Monitoring of Continued Alignment). This MOCA is scheduled to start on June 4 and be decided during the week of October 5-9. As usual, until July, communication between the secretariats is the main focus, but since it's summer vacation, there's no room in the schedule.

For now, we are in the selection process for the assigned auditors (Independent Experts).

2. Certification Implementation

This month, there were zero certifications for the second consecutive month.

3. Report from Certified Holders

This month, we received a contribution from Mr. Taishi Fukushima, President of Asahi Kyohan in Ehime Prefecture, who is consistently engaged in the whitebait business within the group, from fisheries to processing and sales.

"Putting the Desire to Protect the Sea into the MEL Logo" — Boiled Whitebait from Sata Cape, Shikoku —

Taishi Fukushima, President of Asahi Kyohan Co., Ltd.

The Satamisaki Peninsula in Ehime Prefecture is Japan's longest peninsula, jutting into the Bungo Channel, which connects the Seto Inland Sea and the Pacific Ocean. This sea, rich in plankton, has long been known as one of the leading chirimen whitebait fishing grounds in Japan. Asahi Kyohan began its history in 1970 with the fishing of whitebait in this rich sea.



Taishi Fukushima, President of Asahi Kyohan Co., Ltd.

Our encounter with MEL certification came from a single word from a client of our business partner. "Since we are already working on environmentally conscious initiatives, why not promote them more?" Those words gave me a push. MEL's philosophy of protecting the ocean and passing resources to the next generation aligns with the philosophy we have always cherished. There were no particular difficulties in obtaining certification. This is because MEL has naturally practiced the environmental considerations which we

have been seeking even before certification.

Our group company, Fukushima Sangyo, has obtained fishery certification. Fishers take responsibility for the sea, and we at Asahi Kyohan carefully process and distribute these fish. The reason why the group can pass the baton of environmental consideration as a whole "from fishing to the table" is precisely because both companies share the same philosophy.

The most distinctive



Exquisite Asahi Kyohan Co., Ltd. Kama-age Shirasu

feature of their kama-age shirasu (boiled whitebait) is its freshness, which is rare even in Japan—about 30 minutes from the fishing ground to the processing plant. The freshly landed 'shirasu' is immediately sent to the fully automatic kettle. No additives are used, and only Sanuki salt is used for the finish. As the saying goes, "Fresh products can be made without any extra modifications," delivering the natural flavors of the ingredients as they are.

After obtaining MEL certification, our support from customers who choose environmentally conscious products has spread, and we have more points of contact where people learn about our initiatives. To connect the rich sea to the future, we will continue to seriously engage with the sea of Cape Sada going forward. The MEL logo is proof of that.

Thank you, President Fukushima. Kama-age shirasu is widely sold as a product with the MEL logo. Let's bring exquisite kamaage shirasu to homes across Japan and fill your face with smiles. We wish Asahi Kyohan continued success and prosperity.

4. Columns by Stakeholders

As the final installment of the CoC series, we asked Mr. Norifumi Imai (former President of Royal Holdings), who leads the consulting firm 'Food Nest,' which provides consulting to food-related businesses, to write about seafood ingredients from the perspective of the food service industry.

We received some insightful insights from a legend in the food service industry.

"Rebuilding the branding of seafood-related products"



Norifumi Imai, President of Food Nest Co., Ltd.

Norifumi Imai, President and CEO of Food Nest Co., Ltd.

Regarding consumption trends of seafood-related products, we will touch on the future expansion and sustainable branding development that fishers, the food service industry, and food manufacturers desire.

Japan is surrounded by the sea, and since ancient times, seafood has been an important staple food, fostering a food culture that consumes seafood in its diet. Looking at the current situation, when I go to a restaurant, how often do I choose

seafood-related products (hereafter referred to as seafood) and menus? Also, how much seafood ingredients and products are selected as ingredients in food supermarkets. You may realize that there aren't many opportunities to choose. Consumption shrinkage is progressing, and sales floors are shrinking. While there are attractive products as options for consumption, you notice overwhelmingly few variations and the number of items. There is a lack of volume and choices. The emergence of new branding initiatives such as conveyor belt sushi, fish markets, and seafood specialty outlets has led to enjoyable consumption, but it remains limited to providing new methods. For many consumers, the food culture still lacks volume and power to maintain a stable diet and establish a food culture.

For those involved in the food industry, it feels like they have ultimately tolerated the decline and invested their efforts in measures and response. We also cannot overlook the emergence of replacements that squeeze into the gaps. We confront the reality where we face the situation and environment of seafood ingredients and products, and are taking on the challenge of realizing future responses and actions, expanding consumption with a forward-looking perspective, and developing branding that will become established. This requires a reconstruction of efforts across the entire industry.

When considering the challenges and initiatives from the distribution and food service providers, as well as food processing and sales sides, the first point to mention is that the volume of seafood as supplied and the breadth and depth of the food are insufficient. Since it is acceptable to narrow down the market, it is desirable to expand the market specializing in seafood products that are easy to customize and have high consumer desires.

Isn't building a branding that challenges increasing supply volume across related industries, including supply from fishing grounds and aquaculture markets? In parallel, it seems necessary to enhance power and strengthen supply from a global perspective in conjunction with "information provision." Building a supply environment that scales up under the condition of continuous stability will be the pillar for changing consumer trends. Considering the process of enriching dietary habits through increased consumption and volume increases in seafood consumption, shortages of raw materials and stable supply of seafood have put brakes on product distribution and planning, leading to slack and resignation in the expansion and establishment of seafood. In Japan, there is a lack of expansion to incorporate seafood products from the perspective of global food culture. The breadth and quality have not expanded.

In the meat and meat food industry, sustainable branding has been achieved not only by introducing a global livestock food culture but also by arranging and translating under Japanese conditions, expanding raw material supply and imports. This volume increase has been linked to increased consumption. Additionally, it continues to be

established as an option in the diet. As a result, a supply chain with a global perspective has been established. As seen in such precedents, it is necessary to expand seafood products, increase the supply of seafood raw materials, introduce new products from a global food culture perspective, and create supply chains through new branding developments, including "information provision" that contributes to establishment.

Although costs are rising, if the range feels reasonable, and if it leads to quality value and taste satisfaction, it can open up enjoyable developments. Price issues are not a brake in the seafood industry. We want to create a chain reaction toward continuous stabilization.

Many consumers probably expect to eat seafood more frequently. A successful example of expanded consumption is the "conveyor belt sushi," which was widely sold worldwide. A 'system' has been established to nurture sushi, a part of Japanese food culture, through new branding. A new supply chain is being established. In overseas environments, arrangements are also being developed. Branding is about creating a sustainable system. There are still many seafood products that can be candidates from a global perspective and food culture, so shouldn't we challenge ourselves to develop new branding through expanding raw material supply, processing technology, and the 'techniques' of arrangement?

How to develop depends on business viability, sustainable category and item development, and participation from the side supplying and producing raw materials. In supermarket deli and frozen food sections, not only staple products but also new seafood products and increased item volume in product composition are expected to increase, leading to a rise in the proportion of seafood and the number of menu items in the food service industry.

As seen in the EU, the establishment of seafood-focused fast-food chains is also expected to be established in the Japanese market.

In the branding process to expand the supply and consumption of seafood-related products, expanding the use of seafood ingredients as raw materials is essential. We want to build and expand a new supply chain with a worldwide perspective, with resilience linking both fishing grounds and aquaculture markets.

Creating a "measuring rod" that can be used and accepted worldwide is also an essential requirement. Taking into account environmental changes and real-world challenges, Japan's "food processing industry" has the potential to grow and expand into an important sector. Just as the current pillar of the "automobile industry" has expanded growth including exports, signs of future branding development are beginning to appear. Especially regarding seafood-related products, the company possesses the technology and history to expand globally in terms of food culture.

Thank you, Mr. Imai. Rather than being fixated on fisheries eco-labels, I took it as a suggestion that the fisheries industry must do more. From a branding perspective, let's reconsider how certified seafood ingredients can contribute to society and the food service industry. We look forward to your continued guidance.

5. Held the Regular General Assembly

On June 17, the 12th Regular General Assembly of the MEL Council was held. This year's general meeting was an unprecedented event, with Director-General Hitoshi Fujita and other executives from the Fisheries Agency of Japan attending, and more than 30 people including directors and members attending.

Director-General Fujita encouraged MEL, expressing his expectations not only for MEL in supporting Japan's seafood exports and the growth of aquaculture, but also for contributing to the sustainable development of small-scale fisheries worldwide.

Business reports, plans, income and expenditure settlements, budgets, etc. were conducted as usual, but 13 directors (12 reappointed, 1 newly appointed, and 2 auditors currently in office) were appointed for officer appointments. We are undertaking new business initiatives and have received approval for the establishment of MEL fishmeal and fish oil certification standard and compound feed certification standard. To ensure effectiveness, we will strengthen the operational system with the support of stakeholders such as conducting feasibility studies, determining accreditation bodies, certification bodies, and training auditors. Acceptance of certification applications will begin as soon as the certification body is ready to respond. Additionally, regarding revisions to certification standards, the CoC certification standard Ver.3.0 has been approved. Since the amendments have been widespread, the enforcement will be delayed until the certification body can comply with the new standard.

At the board meeting held after the regular general assembly, Naoya Kakizoe was appointed as President and Katsunori Hirai as Executive Director (both reappointed). Additionally, the "Requirements for Certification Bodies" corresponding to the CoC certification standard Ver.3.0, fishmeal and fish oil certification standard, and compound feed certification standard Ver.1.0 were approved at the regular general assembly.

The MEL Council is now in its 10th year since its founding, and as we step up from the original mission of realizing the "Japan-originated, globally recognized seafood eco-label," we aim for the next decade as a leader leading the world by building close cooperative relationships with overseas stakeholders.

6. We held a kickoff meeting for MEL Ambassadors.

On June 8, we held this year's MEL Ambassador Kickoff Meeting. This year, in its sixth

term, eight ambassadors will continue to serve, and seven new participants will join (including three elementary and junior high school students, four parents, with a separate briefing session scheduled on July 2), making a total of 15 participants.

Everyone actively covers events in which the MEL Council participates and shares information through social media, playing a major role in spreading MEL awareness.

Everyone is actively continuing their activities as ambassadors, and the content of their content is constantly evolving. We look forward to having fun activities again this year.



Kickoff Meeting with the 6th Term Ambassadors

7. Last year's MEL-certified seafood production (provisional figure) has been compiled

In fiscal year 2025, MEL-certified seafood production will be 304,000 tons from fisheries (down 34,000 tons year-on-year), 74,000 tons from aquaculture (down 11,000 tons from 2024), totaling 378,000 tons (down 44,000 tons from 2024), and their share of Japan's total production will decrease by 1% to 11%. This was due to a decrease of 30,000 tons of akisake (chum salmon) and 9,000 tons of masaba (chub mackerel) in fisheries, and a decrease of 10,000 tons of scallops and 7,000 tons of yellowtail in aquaculture. We extend our heartfelt sympathies to the harsh figures given by the industries involved.

8. Notification

Please check each website's website for details.

① MEL Parent-Child Classroom Children's Workshop

Date: Wednesday, July 29, 2026, 30

Location: Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo

▽ Application Page

<https://www.melj.jp/oyakokyousitu2026>

② 28th Japan International Seafood and Technology Expo

Event Dates: August 19, 2026 (Wed) ~ August 21, 2026 (Fri), a total of three days

Location: Tokyo Big Sight East Halls 2 & 3

▽ Application Page

<https://www.melj.jp/exhibition>

③ Asasho Summer-Navi @ Osaka Science and Technology Museum 2026 Children's Workshop

Date: Saturday, August 22, 2026

Location: Osaka Science and Technology Museum

▽ Details Page

<https://www.asahi.com/asagakuplus/article/asasho/16636301>

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The world is buzzing with excitement over the FIFA World Cup, and it seems they are enjoying big political and economic news such as the G-7 Summit and the agreement between the U.S. and Iran to end hostilities. Perhaps the sincere wish is that sports will continue to be symbols of peace, contributing to humanity without being caught up in division.

The Japan Meteorological Agency has announced an El Niño occurrence. Usually, El Niño brings a cool summer to Japan, but this time it is considered a super El Niño, predicting a global heatwave. Rising sea temperatures are causing serious damage to global fisheries, raising concerns about further impact. Even so, for those involved in fisheries working in harsh environments, adapting to these challenges requires careful thinking and action.

We wish everyone the best of luck.

MEL Certified Products of the month: Masaki Wakame (Seaweed)

Certified entities: Taro Fisheries Cooperative

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