MEL NEWS
MEL certified products ▸



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MEL Council

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Global natural disasters continue. The debris flow that occurred along the border between China and Nepal is unimaginable both in scale and in terms of the extent of the damage. Large-scale collapses of Himalayan glaciers and bedrock have been reported as triggers, but should we accept this as a sign that global warming is approaching this point?

In Japan, as well as the "Guidelines for Evacuation Information (Cabinet Office, Disaster Prevention Division)" introduced this year, damage from lingering autumn rain fronts and repeated typhoons causing torrential downpours is spreading. Warnings of level 4 and 5, which are reported daily, are no longer fires on the opposite shore. Yet, in western Japan, water shortages have not been resolved, and the Sameura Dam, the water reservoir of Shikoku, is also suffering from a decline in the storage rates of nine dams in Fukuoka City.

You can't help but feel the threats of nature permeating everyday life.

1. International Standardization Related

For GSSI's MOCA (Monitoring of Continued Alignment), additional comments were received from an auditor (Independent Expert) in response to MEL's response. It seemed they were satisfied with MEL's response, and all of them were minor confirmations. Currently, MOCA is proceeding with review by the benchmarking committee.

The "Responsible Seafood Summit 2026," co-hosted by GSA (Global Seafood Alliance) and TCRS (The Center for Responsible Seafood), was held from September 21 to 24 in Bangkok, Thailand. At MEL's invitation, Secretary General Katoh appeared on September 23 in a session titled "How Can Wild-Capture Seafood Certifications Work Together for You? " alongside Mike Kraft, Executive Director of CSI, Linda Wood, Chief Executive Officer of Community Catch, and Gert le Roux, Executive Director of GSSI, among others. During the two-hour session, the introduction of MEL was presented to global fisheries leaders with explanations of government support to fisheries (national and local), ethics and willingness from the fisheries sector, ethical collaboration among SO, CB & AB, strong support from research institutions about fisheries science in the region and global presence of researchers and research institutions. Since there were certain responses, the situation will be reported in next month's issue, including photos.

2. Certification Implementation

Three CoC certifications came into effect on August 31, but none took effect this month. On the other hand, we have received a request from the Jusan Fisheries Cooperative Association (Yamato Shijimi: freshwater clam) in Aomori Prefecture to temporarily suspend certification, and unfortunately, we will proceed with the administrative procedures. Additionally, we have received a message from the Gifu Prefecture Gujo Fisheries Cooperative (Ayu) that the certification will not be renewed. This marks the completion of the first certification for freshwater fisheries in MEL. As the global challenge of promoting certification for small-scale fisheries becomes a challenge, it has become clear once again that the effort and cost of maintaining certification are a serious issue for Japanese small-scale businesses, which are regarded as exemplary models. As the MEL Council, we are planning to visit small-scale businesses that have obtained MEL certification and provide opportunities for consultations on how to utilize the certification.

3. Report from the MEL Auditors

For the second report from the auditors, we asked Mr. Itashi Sakinaga, who is active in aquaculture and CoC evaluations, mainly in Hiroshima.

"A word from the MEL certification on-site inspection"

MEL Judge: Takeshi Sakinaga

I am involved in MEL certification audits related to aquaculture and CoC stages in Hiroshima Prefecture. I was appointed as a MEL auditor in 2018, but my first time learning about the "Fisheries Eco-label" system was training on "AEL: Aquaculture Eco-label" at a meeting of the Japan Fisheries Resources Conservation Association, where received training from then-Executive Director Shimomura at a meeting. Regarding MEL audits, the wholesale company at Hiroshima-shi Central Wholesale Market conducted the first screening in 2021, and I remember nervously conducting the review with support from Mr. Sakamoto from Ehime. In aquaculture, the main audits were for Hiroshima's specialty oysters, and we conducted the first group certification audit for the nation's first fisheries cooperative. Many processing involves oysters, and all major local processing manufacturers have obtained certification. Regarding oyster MEL, the Hiroshima Prefectural government recommends obtaining MEL, and



MEL Auditor Mr. Takeshi Sakinaga

currently, three operators produce about 6 percent of the prefecture's production volume. Amid this, last year there was a problem of mass oyster deaths. In some regions, 90% of the damage occurred, and the cause investigation and countermeasures are being discussed through expert panels. Combined factors such as high water temperatures, high salinity, and food shortages have been pointed out. This year, while I am concerned about future environmental conditions, I was involved in sea condition observation using telemeters at fishing grounds and in the nutrient promotion project from sewage facilities (blockage relief project). It was a support project to resolve bottlenecks from upstream (production area) to downstream (consumption area) in seafood logistics. In MEL as well, through listening to business operators, I feel that various challenges (blockages) are emerging between production (upstream) and processing/distribution (downstream).

One of the challenges is the insufficient variety and supply volume of MEL products. We hear from businesses that "even if we want to handle it, we can't source it," or "even if we want to process it, we don't have raw materials." On the ground, there are cases where MEL acquisition is abandoned or certification is suspended. We consider this a fundamental issue for MEL.

The next thing we often hear is, "Are MEL products selling well?" To maintain the MEL system, I believe MEL products must be properly consumed. No matter how high-quality the products are, if they don't sell, the economy cannot survive. I feel there is a mismatch between the supply and demand of MEL seafood. I consider MEL as a major issue that must be resolved as a whole.

It has been 10 years since MEL began, and I believe there are still many challenges to sustainably operate and develop MEL in the future. It is necessary for related organizations, including the MEL Council, to collaborate to analyze the current situation and consider countermeasures. Also, MEL auditors are the only ones who can directly interact with businesses on site and hear their voices firsthand. While firmly maintaining the position of auditors, I believe they can also take on roles such as information gathering.

When MEL first started, we hoped that MEL products would soon appear in supermarkets and other stores, but now they can finally be purchased at nearby stores. As a auditor, I feel frustrated every time I hear the voices of business operators, but I want to continue fulfilling my role as an auditor, even if only in a small way.

Thank you, Mr. Sakinaga. As you pointed out, there are many challenges. In particular, we are working to maintain close contact points with certified businesses, but I strongly feel that these efforts are going in a spin. Globally, momentum is growing to support small-scale fishers obtaining certification, and MEL secretariat staff are planning

activities to visit businesses. We sincerely ask for your continued support for the development of Japan's seafood eco-label community.

4. Columns by Stakeholders

This month, we asked Kazuo Noda, President of Hachinohe Canning, who holds public positions in Hachinohe Processing Associations, including the Hachinohe Seafood Processing Cooperative Association, in many public offices related to seafood processing and distribution. He reported on the situation of regions struggling with a decrease in landings = a decrease in processed raw materials.

"Yokunai (not good) fish from Hachinohe"

Kazuo Noda
President, Hachinohe Seafood Processing Cooperative Association
President of Hachinohe Canned Food Co., Ltd.

Hachinohe Port in Aomori Prefecture is located north of Sanriku, and among the 13 designated Category 3 fishing ports nationwide, it is the northernmost among them. Designated Category 3 fishing ports are designated as especially important for the fisheries industry under the Fishing Port and Fishing Grounds Development Act.



Kazuo Noda, President of Hachinohe Seafood Processing Cooperative Association

As the representative of both the Wholesale Association and the Seafood Processing Association who buy fish at Hachinohe Fish Market, the local wholesale market in Hachinohe, when talking with fishers as a buyer, I rarely get told, "Since you became the representative, I haven't caught any fish! This never happened during the predecessor's time." That's the reasoning. Their claim is that I had changed the sea, but now, when the types and quantities of fish are scarce, fishers are so troubled that they complain about it.

Brokers and processors are also struggling because they can't get the fish they want. Fresh fish brokers selling to cities also lack variety, and processors often have no raw materials, no size, high energy, expensive seasonings, and expensive packaging materials to make in factories and try to transport them to distant cities to sell, but it doesn't work well.

The current mayor of Hachinohe City is well-versed in the fisheries industry and, from an early stage, was concerned about global warming in the oceans, establishing the organization 'Hachinohe Fisheries Academy' to provide information to fishers, brokers,

processors, transportation, and packaging companies when they were in trouble. What the mayor valued most was his own philosophy: 'Rather than providing answers to those in need, we support those in need so they can find better solutions.' For that reason, the organization is managed by people who are not city employees but business professionals. Even so, among those struggling with their situation, few are willing to think positively about the next move, and rumors have spread such as 'Even if I go there, they won't give me answers,' or 'If I go there, my company will be in danger.'

What I think here is that even if you prepare for the industry, unless the target audience understands what it means, they won't even consider using it. Once you prepare hard, you often have to communicate earnestly to get people to use it well.

With global warming, fish are changing, traditional fishing methods are no longer effective, and the lack of abundant fish is tough not only for fishers, but also for processors who use those fish. The production lines used for processing rarely match other fish species, and even if they do, we often hear cases where differences in size and price make it unsuccessful.

It's not just Hachinohe Port that's struggling; at Sanriku's designated Class 3 fishing ports, we hear similar stories in Kesennuma, Ishinomaki, and Shiogama. When I asked about other fishing ports, I noticed that there are various ideas about what to do next, and since each has their own differences, some people tend to reject new initiatives. For example, if you were to make simmered or grilled fish for sashimi, there might not be a particular issue, but when you propose a dish that adds fish to simmered dishes centered on tofu or vegetables to enhance flavor, you might dismiss it as 'not a fishmonger's job.' If you try to make salted squid as your next job, the company executives will refuse, saying they shouldn't do anything except squid. In case by case, it's hard to come up with ideas for what to do and hard to communicate. To overcome this, rather than focusing on traditional upstream and downstream business flows, it's easier to think about where and in what situations the diners want to eat, and what kind of products are best to offer. This might make it easier to communicate with your colleagues. When work isn't going well, letting go of your old desires and trying to get things through is one approach.

When selling Japanese fish overseas, it's important to learn MEL and make it sellable, but if you sell it to supermarkets in countries where you don't know how to eat fish, I don't think people there will buy it right away. Not only in Japan but also in foreign supermarkets don't teach you 'this is how you should eat it.' What you want to do is not just fish but people who handle fish. Now, as the sea, fish, sales methods, and destinations change, how would you like to respond? With your friends.

Thank you, President Noda. As someone who has watched Hachinohe for decades, ever since the days of my father Shizuo, who was famous for the big mackerel and squid catches, I can truly relate to President Noda's words. I believe President Noda's

generation, once called young, is already in a period of generational change, but I hope you will work a little harder as a leader of the 'yoi' (good) leader of Hachinohe's fisheries world, not just the 'yokunai' (not good) of the struggling Hachinohe seafood world.

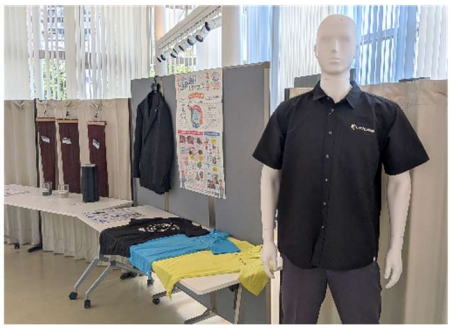
5. ***We will hold a meeting with Mike Kraft, Executive Director of CSI.***

As mentioned in the international standardization section, I asked Mr. Mike Kraft, Executive Director of CSI, who attended the Responsible Seafood Summit held in Bangkok, to stop by Japan on his way back, and on September 25, we will have a meeting to address the unresolved issues regarding mutual recognition of CoC certification between MEL and CSI. The details will be reported in next month's issue.

6. ***Exhibit at Shinagawa Aquarium events***

At Shinagawa Aquarium (Shinagawa-ku, Tokyo), starting September 25, the SDGs adoption day, all staff will wear uniforms made from recycled used fishing nets. In conjunction with this, on September 25-26, the "SDGs Panel Exhibition" themed "Waste Fishing Net Recycling" will be held, and together with the "Fisheries Plastic Recycling Promotion Council" (Re:ism), which is engaged in fishing net recycling, MEL will also be exhibiting. At the venue, panel displays will introduce how used fishing nets are collected, recycled, and transformed into new products. MEL will introduce MEL-certified seafood products and products bearing the logo to help people learn about sustainable fisheries.






We are very pleased that your various events are expanding your activities toward protecting the ocean.

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As reported at the certification validation section, the certification of Jusan Fisheries Cooperative (Shijimi Keta Net Fisheries) was temporarily suspended, and the certification of Gujo Fisheries Cooperative (Ayu Tomozuri Fisheries) was decided not to be renewed. Jusan Fisheries Cooperative has promoted its efforts to protect the resources of Jusan Lake over the past ten years as an advanced example of MEL, and we sincerely thank you

for continuing the fishing culture of Tomozuri, a Japanese fishing industry that Japan is proud of worldwide for five years.

According to Climate Central, which analyzed global sea surface temperature data from the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), this year's global sea surface temperatures have set new highest records for 100 consecutive days from June 2 until September 10. Since sea temperatures are expected to remain high under El Niño, the impact on the ocean is becoming increasingly serious. I don't want to blame that, but both Pacific saury and autumn salmon are just struggling with the poor catch as forecasted. At the very least, let's hope the returning bonito do well.

MEL Certified Products of the month: Skipjack tuna (skinless)
Certified entities: Taisin Suisan Co., Ltd.

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