

OPRT

Sankaido Bldg. (7th Floor)1-9-13 Akasaka,
Minato-ku Tokyo, Japan 107-0052
Tel: 03-3568-6388; Fax:03-3568-6389
Website:<http://www.oprt.or.jp>

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FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF TUNAS

Public Should Be Informed about Actual State of Tuna Resources Interview with Dr. Uozumi, author of "Are Tunas Endangered?"

A book entitled "Are Tunas Endangered?" written by Dr. Yuji Uozumi was recently published by Seizando Shoten Publishing Co. in Tokyo. This inspiring title seemed to have attracted attention of many people. Fishermen might have felt a mixture of anger and anxiety and consumers might have thought of the days when tunas disappear from their table. In this stimulating title, we can see the author's wish to bring the facts on tuna resources to the attention of many people, fully assuming such reactions from the readers. Dr. Uozumi, who is Director of the Western Pacific Tuna and Skipjack Resources Division, the National Research Institute of Far Seas Fisheries, talked about his views, as a scientist, on the state of tuna resources and other issues.

QUESTION: The title of the book does have a strong impact.

UOZUMI: The title did not come to my mind in a flash because I was pondering how best I could address the issue. The words "species threatened with the risk of extinction" sound a little knotty for ordinary people. What I wanted to convey to the readers was the fact that tunas are not endangered.

QUESTION: How do you think of the view to equate tunas with a species nearing extinction?

UOZUMI: From the viewpoint of a researcher of fish population science, I can say that it is unlikely that fishes, especially those in the offshore areas, become extinct by fishing activities. So the issue of extinction, though it existed as a concept, has never been discussed among fish population

scientists. I was attending the conference of the IUCN when it listed tunas on its Red List as an endangered species. Although I strongly opposed to that decision, tunas ended up to be included in the list. I still cannot approve of this listing.

QUESTION: But the public acceptance of the listing differed from your view.

UOZUMI: The ordinary people may be naturally led to think that tuna is an endangered species because they have very little knowledge on what is happening in the sea, although, in the case of terrestrial fauna and flora, the endangered state can be confirmed directly. So when the public is told that a certain marine species is threatened with the risk of extinction, they can easily build such an image in their mind.

QUESTION: Then, what is the actual state of tuna population seen from the perspective of a fish population expert?

UOZUMI: For instance, in the case of Atlantic bluefin tuna, it is true that their population is on a decrease. There is a need to manage the resources. But, to the question whether they will go extinct, my answer is a definite "NO." Just think of the fact that, although tunas are said to be decreasing, they still have a population enough to support fisheries of many industries which are utilizing tunas in hundreds of thousand or in millions. I discussed the state of tuna population with experts of conservation biology and other scientific domains who specialize in the resources of wild fauna and flora. They unanimously said that tunas are not a species subjected to discussion on the fear of extinction.

QUESTION: But in the IUCN as well, it is experts who determine the listing through their professional discussion. Isn't that right?

UOZUMI: Yes, experts make decisions. But, in actuality, those experts are researchers of taxonomy or breeding science. While they assert themselves as experts, many of them are outside the domain of fishery

population science. Those non-fishery researchers decide on endangered status depending only on the fact that the species under review fits one criterion.

QUESTION: In your book, you raised the issue of criteria themselves.

UOZUMI: The criteria are significant in that they were developed by experts in conservation biology. But we need assumption whether a species should really be applied to those criteria. The very assumption that the IUCN has so far been using has been ambiguous. So, if the IUCN criteria are applied to the pine, all the pine species along the beaches everywhere comes to be categorized as "endangered." Sensible conservation biologists are concerned about negative impact that could be caused on the protection of truly endangered species of fauna and flora, unless credible lists are formulated.

QUESTION: It is difficult to convey such fact to the general public, isn't it?

UOZUMI: This book has been written out of the hope that the ordinary people will come to know the truth. As the saying goes, "good news falls behind bad news." Bad news spreads fast and negative image tends to take root with ease. One such example is a paper by Myers and others published in the Nature Magazine, in which the authors pointed to the possibility that the population of tuna and billfish population has drastically declined and there exists a risk of extinction for those species. Their paper drew a conclusion based only on partial data, and is far from reflecting the overall trend of tuna resources. The population scientists with whom I have been acquainted share the same view with me regarding this issue.

QUESTION: You also pointed out in your book some issues pertaining to the concept of precautionary approach.

UOZUMI: Precautionary approach in marine resource management differs from the "precautionary principles," which is a concept to prevent irreparable consequences as used in the case of nuclear power generation. Unlike the "precautionary principles," the precautionary approach involves flexibility fully incorporating the renewable capability of the oceans. This

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does not project a good image of fisheries. But I think it better for fishermen not to evade the issue of precautionary approach but to reconfirm its meaning, and come up openly with realistic precautionary approach.

QUESTION: How do you think man should cope with tuna resources in the future?

UOZUMI: Honestly, knowledge on fish, not only tuna, is not sufficient and certain. It is the research on fishery resources to know to what the scope of those uncertainties is. It is equally important for fishermen themselves to meet the challenge of uncertainties. It is crucial to see through uncertainties and determine the appropriate level of use of the fishery resources, taking also the socio-economic impact into consideration. This means that fishermen may be required to endure harder restraint on their fishing at times, the fishery resource may be required to endure over-use at times, and consumers to endure higher prices under the

uncertainties. I believe fishermen should firmly recognize the nature of uncertainties and conduct fishing, adhering to the conservation and management measures.

QUESTION: What do you think is important to ensure sustainable use of tunas?

UOZUMI: In order to survive, man has no other way than to use the nature. If you think that the protection of the nature is the highest and most important purpose, then minimizing the human impact towards the nature will be the answer. Naturally, you may then consider that the reduction of the number of human beings is the easiest way to achieve the purpose. I do not support such an idea. I think it is important to ensure that human beings live in harmony and in a good balance with the nature. In order to realize true sustainable use of natural resources, this view should be based on considering the use of the natural resources.

In case of tuna resources, it would be meaningless if the fisheries cannot survive or collapse because of excessive protection of the resources, which may bring about non-use or minimum use of the resources, while the resources are kept in a sound condition. As long as human beings use tuna, it is essential not only for fishermen but all the parties concerned with tuna, including consumers, to fulfill their responsibility toward the resources, and keep the balance between the risk and benefits. In this sense, the presence of the OPRT having as its members all the stakeholders from producers, distributors and consumers as well as tuna longline fishermen around the world has a great significance. Expectation is great for the OPRT's future role.

Ecuador's FUNDATUNA Becomes New OPRT Member

President Perotti Shows Strong Commitment for Cooperation

At its Board of Directors meeting on Monday, February 2, 2004, the OPRT discussed and approved the application by Ecuador's Foundation for the Promotion of Responsible Tuna Fisheries (FUNDATUNA) for admission to OPRT as a full member.

FUNDATUNA has three affiliated fishing companies with five large-scale freezer pelagic tuna longline fishing vessels, whose export to Japan totaled 677 tons in January-October 2003.

As a result, the total number of OPRT full member organizations now stands at 16, with a total of 1,460 vessels registered with OPRT. This means most of the world's large-scale tuna longline fishing

vessels are registered with OPRT.

Referring to the new entry of Ecuador's tuna longline fishing organization, OPRT President Hiroya Sano said:

1) We are pleased to see the birth of a fellow organization in Central and South America that acknowledges the significance of promoting responsible tuna fisheries and joins us in making efforts toward the sound and sustainable use of tuna resources.

2) We are also encouraged by the increasing number of our member organizations to counter the movements of pseudo environmentalist groups who are focusing their anti-commercial fishing campaigns on tuna longline fisheries and

making unreasonable attacks against the latter.

**Message from
Mr. Giansandro Perotti,
President of FUNDATUNA
(an excerpt)**

We ratify our commitment to work jointly to contribute for the development of responsible tuna fisheries and support difusion, execution and accomplishment of the objectives of FAO's Code of Conduct for Reponsible Fisheries as well as COFI's International Plans of Action, especially the ones to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminiate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and the Management of Fishing Capacity.

OFCF To Help China Develop Tuna Market

Japan's Overseas Fisheries Cooperation Foundation (OFCF) signed with the Bureau of Fisheries, the Ministry of Agriculture of the People's Republic of China, in Beijing on November 17, 2003, a memorandum on the "Tuna Market Development Project in China" as part of Japan's fishery cooperation to China.

The project is aimed at cooperating with China in developing the tuna market in this country having a population of 1.3 billion, and specifically to assist expansion of consumption of tuna in Beijing. Based on this agreement, working-level consultations were held in the Chinese capital city from

February 8 to 13, 2004. Discussion centered on exchanges of views on sending of two Japanese experts by early March, opening of an experts' office in China, and arrangement for procurement of materials for experimental small-scale cold chain (ultra-low-temperature) facilities.

The Japanese experts will work with their Chinese counterparts in developing detailed programs for future implementation.

In China, there are already restaurants serving tuna, centering on coastal cities, and expectation is high that China will develop into the largest tuna market only next to Japan.

Tuna Fisheries Enter An Era of Int'l Vessel Management

Japan-Tuna President
Ueda

In an interview in Tokyo on January 8, 2004, Yamato Ueda, President of the Japan Federation of Tuna Fisheries Cooperative Associations, said that the introduction of positive list scheme has caused tuna fisheries to usher in an era of international management of the number of fishing vessels. Further, he pointed to the need to reduce the number of vessels to meet the state of stock and market situation, as well as the need to restrain and limit ever-expanding large-scale purse-seine fisheries worldwide. What follows is a gist of the interview:

(Continued on Page 4)

Introduction of the Positive List Scheme

The elimination of the Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing vessels has advanced visibly, mainly prompted by the introduction of the Positive List scheme at various international resource management organizations. A recognition not to allow operation by IUU fishing vessels have now taken root in the international society, and the move to newly start IUU fishing has been restrained. The Positive List scheme was started with the aim to eliminate IUU fishing activities. Put another way, it is a registration system for duly-authorized fishing vessels operating in compliance with the international resource management scheme. It can be said that by the implementation

of the Positive List scheme, the world's distant-water tuna longline fishing has entered into a new phase in which the number of fishing vessels is managed internationally.

Control of fishing effort

At the World Tuna Longline Fishery Conference (WTLFC) held in Tokyo last August, the governments of six countries and eight organizations who are members of the OPRT issued a joint declaration in which they called for control of fishing efforts. This declaration apparently expressed a commitment to restrain fishing vessel capacity, in addition to the effort to promote effectively the elimination of IUU fishing vessels. Bearing this situation in mind, we should encourage parties concerned on the need to

reduce the number of the present 1480 distant-water longline fishing vessels belonging to the OPRT to the level appropriately meeting the state of the tuna population and the market situation.

The issue of expanding scale of large-type purse-seine fishing vessels

The global expansion of the scale of large-type purse-seine fishing vessels is causing damage on parent tuna resources by bycatch of small-size fishes, such as bigeye and yellowfin tunas. There is an urgent need to expedite implementation of measures to restrain and limit large-type purse-seine fisheries through introduction of the Positive List Scheme.

Moves of the international management organizations

ICCAT

Positive List To Be Introduced for Farmed Tuna

The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) decided on management measures for farmed bluefin tunas raised along the Mediterranean Sea at its general meeting held in Dublin, Ireland, from November 17 to 24.

This is what one might call the farmed tuna version of the Positive List system already being adapted to fishing vessels. If this system is enforced, trading of farmed bluefin tunas other than those from the duly-registered farms will not be allowed. The system will be enforced effective from August this year, after registrations are made by tuna farms.

Under the present measures targeting Mediterranean farmed bluefin tunas, each farm will be

required to register and report about such items as the number of the tunas in the farm cages as well as meat increase coefficients. By the implementation of this system, transparency in production will be ensured, and orderly trading will be pursued. No trading will be allowed for tunas from non-listed farms.

The Mediterranean farmed bluefin tunas in the farming cages, which stood at 14,000 tons in 2002, increased to 21,000 tons in 2003. As the total allowable catch of bluefin tunas for the eastern Atlantic is set at 32,000 tons, it means that about two thirds of them are from farming. Although prices of bluefin tuna are declining because of excessive supply, there are still moves in such non-ICCAT member countries as Israel and Egypt to launch new farming grounds, causing concern among countries involved.

Masanori Miyahara, ICCAT Chairman and also Japan's chief

delegate, told reporters that implementation of the Positive List system for farmed bluefin tuna will help clarify the actual situation of farmed bluefin tuna production which had many uncertain elements.

IATTC

Steps to Reduce Sea Turtle Bycatch Developed

The Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) developed specific steps to solve the bycatch issue of sea turtles as well as a three-year program to improve sea turtle conservation at the 4th Meeting of the Working Group on Bycatch in Kobe, Japan, January 14-16, 2004. Further discussion on the draft resolutions and the three-year program will take place at the IATTC annual meeting in Peru in June 7-18, 2004.