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CIEL BLUE Koji-machi (4F)
 3-4-3 Koji-machi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-0083
 Tel: 03-6256-9138; Fax:03-6256-9139
 Website: <https://www.oprt.or.jp>

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FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF TUNAS

Aiming to foster desirable fishing companies and fishing vessels

National Fisheries Employment Recruitment and Development Center (General Incorporated Association), JAPAN
 Ms. Atsuko Magami, Secretary General



Established in 2012, the National Fisheries Employment Recruitment and Development Center (Ryo-shi.jp) is the only organization in Japan that works nationwide to recruit and develop people to work in the fishing industry, including deep-sea bonito and tuna fishing. The main pillars of the business are "activities to increase the number of fishermen," centered on fishing employment support fairs, and "development activities," such as long-term training for those with no experience in fishing, but in recent years, the business has also been focusing on "activities to prevent a decrease." We asked the Secretary General, Ms. Atsuko Magami, who is aiming to foster vessels, companies, and an industry that are desirable to young people and supports those who want to become fishermen, about her thoughts on the business.

Interviewer: Please tell us about the activities of Ryo-shi.jp.

Ms. Magami: Every year, we hold a "fishing employment support fair" to match inexperienced people who want to work in the fishing industry with fishing companies that want to accept new fishermen. The events have been held since 2002, when the organization was still a voluntary organization within the Japan Fisheries Association, before it took on its current structure, and the event held in Tokyo in February this year was the 105th. The total number of visitors to date has exceeded 16,000. Initially, the focus was on coastal fishing, but in 2009, companies involved in deep-sea tuna longline fishing also began participating. The types and regions of fishing from

which companies wish to join are expanding to coastal, offshore, and deep-sea.

Interviewer: What kind of people attend?

Ms. Magami: At the three events held in Fukuoka, Osaka, and Tokyo in July 2024, 56% of the attendees were working adults and 27% were students. In the past, the majority of attendees were working adults looking to change jobs, but the proportion of students is on the rise.

Interviewer: We have also heard from vessel owners that there are increased opportunities to secure new recruits.

Ms. Magami: We also hold online seminars for learning about the work of fishermen, and classes for learning about the work of fishermen at fisheries schools. Last June, we held a class for learning about vessels and fishing at Yaizu Fisheries High School, which also included a vessel ride experience, with the cooperation of a deep-sea tuna longline fishing company and an overseas purse seine fishing company. Some students who want to work in deep-sea fishing end up giving up because their parents are against it. By having not only the students but also their families see the ship and talk to the crew, they were able to feel that they would be able to work in this environment and support the community.

Interviewer: The scope of your activities is expanding year by year.

Ms. Magami: We want people to know that fishing is an option for future employment. We want them to be interested in fishing. We are working to increase the number of people who support fishermen.

Interviewer: You are also focusing on "activities to prevent the decline of fishermen."

Ms. Magami: Many young people across the country have become fishermen as a result of the fairs. There are also increasing numbers of people who, after learning about others' success, want to become fishermen themselves. However, there were cases where young men participated in the fairs with

enthusiasm, saying "I want to fulfill my childhood dream," but after they actually boarded the vessel, upon disembarking, they revealed that they were being subjected to power harassment. I really hated the fact that we encouraged people to try being a fisherman, but then sent them to an industry where power harassment occurs and forces them to quit their job. Even though there are young people who want to do these jobs, the number of consultations about leaving is increasing every year. I felt that if we left this fact unaddressed, our activities to "increase" and "develop" would be meaningless.

Interviewer: The low retention rate is an issue.

Ms. Magami: Not only veteran crew members onboard vessels, but also the industry as a whole has little awareness or self-awareness of power harassment, so it is dismissed as "common." On the other hand, if young people think, "No matter what I do, I will just be criticized," the number of employees will decrease and the aging of the workforce will continue to progress. On the other hand, when employers and senior crew members are asked, "Do you have high hopes for young people?" they all nod, so I call on them to "make an effort to get closer to younger people."

Interviewer: Please tell me more details.

Ms. Magami: First, you should get to know the young people you will be working with. The generation that grew up being told to "learn by watching others' backs" may not be good at communicating with words. However, young people value efficiency and prefer systematization. It is also necessary to communicate the content of the work in words, not by feeling, and to create manuals. While young people have a strong desire to be recognized, they also tend to get depressed when they are scolded. You should clearly communicate "how they are contributing to working on this ship." I understand that sometimes you may be too forceful in order to ensure safety, but you should explain the reason properly afterwards and sometimes say "I'm sorry." Even if you get angry, you need words to make up for it. In addition, young people tend not to hesitate to change jobs. Young people with ambition tend to see changing jobs as a step up. They think, "If I don't like it, I can quit." That's why you need to become a desirable company and fishing boat.

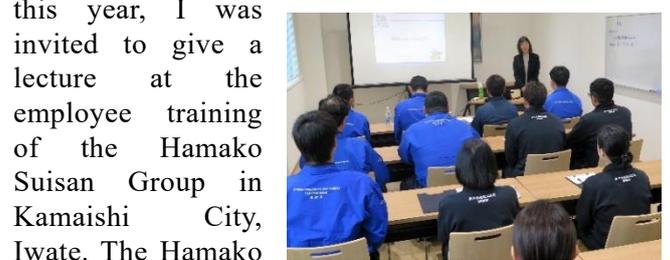
Interviewer: I often hear that even if young people are hired full-time, they don't last long.

Ms. Magami: So what measures have these companies

taken? I've heard that on ocean-going vessels, they install Wi-Fi on the vessels, but if you can't get along with the people next to you, it could actually increase your loneliness. It's easy to say, and it may be idealistic, but the current high turnover rate has been caused by neglecting post-recruitment support. It's easy to say, "It's due to the labor shortage and aging population," but if there is support to "prevent the decline" rather than only increasing and developing the number of young fishermen, the number of young fishermen should increase.

Interviewer: Recently, you have been giving lectures to managers, employees, and crew members of the fishing industry, including on anti-harassment measures.

Ms. Magami: Last December, I was invited to give a lecture at the general meeting of the National Tuna Modernization Promotion Council of the Japan Tuna Fisheries Co-operative Association, and in March



this year, I was invited to give a lecture at the employee training of the Hamako Suisan Group in Kamaishi City, Iwate. The Hamako Suisan Group owns 11 ocean-going tuna longline vessels, 3 saury net vessels, and 4 offshore bottom trawlers. They seemed to have trouble communicating and sharing information, but they all shared the same desire to "keep the current crew members working for us for a long time." Through the lecture, they seemed to realize that everyone needs to support each other. How can we create an environment where employees can settle in, together with onshore employees? They said, "I want to create relationships where we can talk and ask for advice, regardless of the generation gap."

Interviewer: If we don't change our mindset from "it's different from work on land," the survival of the fishing industry is in jeopardy.

Ms. Magami: Today's students looking for jobs consider statements such as "We provide training on power harassment and compliance measures" in company information as one of their selection criteria. A survey aimed at students at seafarer training schools was conducted by the Seafarers' Insurance Department of the National Health Insurance Association and it asked, "What kind of company do you want to work for?" The top answer was "A company that cares about the health and working

style of seafarers." The fishing industry is entering an era where if they do not take such initiatives, they will be dismissed at the start of the recruitment process.

Interviewer: Is the "Ryo-shi JP Supporter System" that started in 2022 also part of this?

Ms. Magami: Yes. It is a membership system for fishing companies, individual fishermen, and fishing cooperatives, with the condition that they put effort into training new fishermen, such as taking measures against harassment and ensuring safety, in order to allow new fishermen to continue working in an environment that is easy for them to work in for a long time. Supporter companies are introduced on the dedicated website "gyosapo.jp," and job information is compiled into a booklet that is distributed to fisheries high schools across the country. We want to create a system that allows students to send off their graduates with the feeling that "it's safe with a supporting company." By promoting hard-working fishermen, we hope to gain support from the public, and to foster desirable companies and fishing boats, about which people say, "I want to work on that fishing vessel."

OPRT Workshop

On March 7, OPRT held a hybrid workshop in Tokyo, where participants shared information and exchanged opinions on the situation in each country and future responses on two themes. (A total of over 60 people attended from Japan and overseas.)

Part 1: Electronic Monitoring (EM)

This theme was held because all tuna-related regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) had agreed on interim minimum standards for the introduction and implementation of EM systems by 2024, and it is necessary to share information among OPRT members as a global issue.

First, the Fisheries Agency gave a presentation on "The current status of EM discussions in RFMOs and Japan's efforts," followed by OPRT members from China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, who each presented the current status and efforts of EM in their own countries.

Participants then held a Q&A session and exchanged opinions, sharing technical issues such as the budget and cost of installing and operating the equipment, the burden on the operation sites, establishing an image data analysis system, data attribution, privacy

protection, and maintenance of equipment at sea.

The conclusions of the workshop were that

- ① OPRT members and other longline countries recognized the need to work positively toward the introduction of EM, even if it takes time.
- ② OPRT members confirmed that they will continue to make efforts to resolve common problems and establish an efficient and workable EM system with the support of their governments.
- ③ OPRT members unanimously confirmed that they will continue to exchange information and raise the issue in future review discussions on EM at each RFMO.
- ④ The OPRT Secretariat will continue to focus on sharing and providing information on EM among members.



Part 2: Tuna Market Issues

This theme was held due to the need to share information on the issue of the concentrated delivery of catches to the Japanese market, which is causing excess inventory and a decline in sashimi tuna prices.

Kenji Kagawa, president of the Japan Tuna Fisheries Co-operative Association, gave a bleak forecast, saying that "increased consumption and higher frozen tuna prices are unlikely for the time being," due to competition with meat and salmon, as well as the increasing near-shore fresh tunas and farmed bluefin tuna.



He expressed concern that "wild tuna is being overlooked," with farmed bluefin tuna from the Mediterranean currently on store shelves.

In addition to these consumer trends, shipments from overseas continue to flow despite the weak yen. Transport reefers are also being delayed for long periods because ultra-low temperature refrigerators are full. He said that rising fuel and labor costs are putting

pressure on management, just like in Japan, for foreign ships.

Member Associations from Korea and Taiwan said that "exports to Japan are stable," but they seem to be aware of the oversupply and spoke of the need to export to Europe and the United States. For this reason, foreign members also expressed their understanding for Kagawa's appeal that "if we increase the amount of exports to third countries, the Japanese market price will recover little by little, and everyone will be happy."

However, they also expressed concerns such as "exports to Europe and the United States must be made from vessels that guarantee sustainability. This is where we need to make an effort" (Korea Ocean Industry Association Tuna Longline Fisheries Committee), and "The vessels are getting old, so it's difficult to get Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) certification. Will we make a profit by spending the money to get Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification?" (Taiwan Ocean Tuna Longline Fishing Boat and Fish Exporters Association).

As a result of the exchange of opinions, members were urged to consume the fish domestically in their own countries and sell them to third countries. On the other hand, while it is difficult to obtain HACCP and eco-label certification to sell to the United States and Europe, member countries are steadily making progress in looking toward overseas markets.

OPRT Chairman Uozumi Yuji acknowledges the organization's goal of "measures to strengthen the conservation and management of tuna species," and recognizes the need for improvements through international resource management. However, he noted that the organization is only halfway there in "fostering healthy tuna markets" and he is concerned that "producers will not be able to survive" unless they can pass on costs to prices.

The OPRT Secretariat stated that the OPRT will also make efforts to expand the consumption of wild sashimi tuna for overseas markets, including inbound tourists in Japan, towards "fostering healthy tuna markets."

Summary of the results of the IOTC Annual Meeting

The 29th Session of the IOTC annual Meeting was held in La Reunion from April 13 to 17, 2025.

1. Conservation and management measures for bigeye

In accordance with the management procedure for bigeye, an increase of 15% from the current national

catch limit for 2026-2028 was agreed upon.

Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and National Catch Limits (tons/year)

	New catch limits (2026, 2027, 2028)	Current catch limits (2024, 2025)
TAC	92,670	80,583
Indonesia	21,396	18,605
EU	19,562	17,010
Seychelles	13,664	11,882
Taiwan	13,211	11,488
Sri Lanka	5,488	4,772
China	4,353	3,785
Japan	4,237	3,684
Iran	2,421	2,105
Mauritius	2,482	None

For other countries, the recommendation was to maintain average catch levels from 2019 to 2023.

2. Conservation and management measures for yellowfin

No agreement was reached on revising the national catch limits of yellowfin, and the current measures will continue.

3. Other matters

- (1) Regarding full utilization of sharks, new measures have been introduced for the finning of frozen sharks.
- (2) There has been no progress on crew labor issues.
- (3) As part of the IOTC Skipjack Management Procedure, a quota for skipjack was set. The TAC for 2025 and 2026 is set at 628,606 tons.
- (4) The next annual meeting is scheduled to be held in Maldives in May 2026.

Malaysia's new membership approved

The board meeting was held on March 21, 2025. The OPRT discussed the application for membership to the OPRT submitted by the Malaysian Tuna Association (MTA). The MTA was approved to join the OPRT as it was confirmed that the MTA agreed with the purpose of establishing the OPRT and managing the capacity of Malaysia's longline fishing vessels.

The MTA is the national organization for tuna longline fishing in Malaysia, and is registered in Petaling Jaya, a satellite city adjacent to the capital, Kuala Lumpur.