



OPRT

NEWSLETTER INTERNATIONAL

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FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF TUNAS

Tuna Procurement with Consideration for the Environment and Human Rights

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Mitsubishi Corporation established and published its “Tuna Procurement Guidelines” in August 2022. These guidelines address not only environmental issues such as resource conservation, but also social issues such as illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and forced, slave, and child labor. The guidelines were updated on July 4, 2025. We spoke with Yusuke Kishida, Team Leader of the Business Strategy Team, Marine Products Department, about why the entirety of Mitsubishi Corporation Group, together with Toyo Reizo Co., Ltd., Japan’s largest tuna trader, is committed to sustainable procurement.

Interviewer: Why did Mitsubishi Corporation establish these guidelines for tuna procurement?

Mr. Kishida: When it comes to challenges in the tuna business, resource conservation used to be a major theme. We also published the “Bluefin Tuna Sustainable Sourcing Policy” in 2008. However, thanks to strict international resource management, resources are currently recovering.

Nevertheless, in recent years, societal concerns such as traceability issues, including IUU fishing, and human rights violations have also been attracting attention. Addressing these issues is crucial for expanding the seafood business globally. Therefore, our group has established guidelines to contribute to resolving environmental and social challenges.

Interviewer: In order to continue utilizing tuna resources sustainably, the international media is closely watching how Japan, the country with the largest share of consumption, will act in the future.

Mr. Kishida: Since 2017, we have been conducting

questionnaire-based surveys to identify risks and issues in the tuna and shrimp supply chain. We ask our suppliers to respond to questions about environmental considerations, IUU fishing, and measures against forced, slave, and child labor. This has allowed us to understand the actual situation, and if areas for improvement are identified, we consider and implement measures.

There are over 80 questions, covering both environmental and social aspects.

We conduct these surveys company-wide with our direct Tier 1 suppliers, and in 2022 we expanded the scope of the survey to include Tier 2 suppliers as well. We will continue to prioritize and expand the scope of the survey.

To further ensure objectivity, we have begun conducting external audits through external auditing organizations based on the guidelines we established in 2022.

Interviewer: The guidelines state that efforts should be made to “identify risks and issues in the supply chain, share audit results with the supplier, and collaborate to consider and implement improvement measures.”

Mr. Kishida: We’re getting an external perspective to make sure we’re doing things properly. Our current target is deep-sea tuna longline fisheries operated by vessels from Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and China, and we’re conducting interviews with three levels of responsibility: on-shore management, the vessel captains, and the crew.

However, coordinating the timing of the vessels’ return to port with the auditing company’s schedule is difficult, making speed an issue. Therefore, from fiscal 2024, we introduced in-house audits, which are conducted by employees of our own group and allow for a more agile response than external audits.

Through questionnaires, external audits, and in-house audits, we are promoting enhanced due diligence to address issues related to IUU fishing and human rights violations.

We conducted 30 in-house audits in fiscal year 2024. In the future, we are considering expanding the scope to include not only longline fishing vessels but also purse seine vessels and fish farming companies.

Interviewer: How do the producers react to surveys and audits?

Mr. Kishida: They are interested in industry issues and

are cooperative. In particular, I feel that the awareness of producers has changed significantly in recent years. While “audits” can come across as harsh, our approach is based on the idea of “supporting fishing vessels and companies that take tuna fishing seriously and creating a sustainable industry.”

A sustainable industry benefits all. It’s also important for protecting the industry, and we want to take the lead in this effort.

Interviewer: Are there any issues that could lead to a suspension of business at this point?

Mr. Kishida: Currently, we have not identified any issues that would lead to a suspension of business. In order to maintain the long-distance tuna longline fishing industry, we intend to continue consultations with stakeholders and strengthen cooperation with fishing operators who are working diligently.

Interviewer: Regarding operational transparency, discussions on the introduction of electronic monitoring (EM) have begun in all Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs).

Mr. Kishida: Given the current difficulty in increasing the number of observers on board, EM is one solution. However, there are many hurdles: who will implement it? Where and how many devices should be installed? What about the cost? And how will we handle monitoring and analysis from shore? Regarding video analysis, I believe that advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) will lead to improvements in the future. However, there are limitations to individual companies implementing this, and I think that industry-wide cooperation could accelerate the process. Above all, the deterrent effect of EM, as a way of showing that “we are watching from shore,” will help prevent IUU fishing and forced labor. Long-distance tuna longline fishing, which involves long voyages, is difficult to monitor from the outside, and establishing a monitoring system is challenging. Since individual companies have limitations, we want to consider and implement what we can in cooperation with the government.

Interviewer: When you updated the guidelines in July, you added criteria to ensure traceability.

Mr. Kishida: We have set indicators to ensure traceability for responsible sourcing. We aim to secure the data recommended by the GDST (Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability), the international standard for seafood trade.

Interviewer: You are also disclosing your progress since the guidelines were established in 2022.

Mr. Kishida: Our group has set a target of achieving 30% certified products by 2030 for the tuna we source,

based on the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI) certification. As of 2024, we have reached approximately 20%. We will continue our efforts to achieve our target of 30%.

The current eco-label certification criteria mainly focus on environmental aspects, but the criteria are being updated, and the introduction of social criteria is being considered. Taking these points into account, we would like to collaborate with fishing vessels aiming for certification to increase the handling of certified tuna.

Interviewer: On the other hand, I have heard that obtaining eco-label certification imposes a significant burden on companies.

Mr. Kishida: Being certified by an eco-label is proof of conducting sustainable fishing.

However, for certification to become widespread, it needs to penetrate the industry and consumer awareness must increase.

Overseas, the importance of certification is increasing year by year. Sashimi-grade tuna is still primarily sold in Japan, but demand is also growing overseas.

To ensure a stable supply of seafood in Japan, we need to further convey Japanese consumers about eco-labels, and I believe it’s essential to sell at fair prices that reflect our overhead costs.

Interviewer: Along with the tuna guideline update, a procurement guideline for all seafood was also announced.

Mr. Kishida: Our group also handles seafood besides tuna. From the perspectives of ensuring business continuity in the long term and guaranteeing a stable supply of seafood for future generations, we have formulated and published “Seafood Procurement Guidelines.”

Specifically, our basic policies include the conservation of marine ecosystems, respect for human rights and workers’ rights, elimination of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and dialogue with stakeholders.

Furthermore, we are committed to sustainable and fair business operations through initiatives such as “handling sustainable seafood,” “ensuring traceability,” “risk management through sustainable supply chain audits,” and establishing a grievance mechanism for external stakeholders, particularly regarding tuna.

Interviewer: Will the tuna procurement guidelines be further updated in the future?

Mr. Kishida: We will continuously review and improve the guidelines, and we plan to disclose the results and progress regularly. While we are committed to resource conservation and respect for human rights, these are not issues that can be solved immediately. We must continue to engage in dialogue with all stakeholders and

move forward step by step.

At the same time, we must absolutely avoid any actions that would disadvantage fishermen. We understand that many fishing businesses are struggling due to rising costs, including difficulties in securing manpower and increasing fuel costs.

We must also prevent further reductions in the number of tuna longline fishing vessels, which could lead to an unstable supply of tuna. Our group believes it is important to strengthen collaboration with all stakeholders to ensure a stable supply of high-quality sashimi tuna for future generations. By taking action, we aim to promote solutions to these challenges together with all stakeholders.

There is no endpoint to our commitment to sustainability, but as a start, we will take action step by step to achieve the goals outlined in our guidelines.

IATTC annual Meeting

The 103rd Session of the IATTC annual Meeting was held in Panama City, Panama on September 1–5, 2025.

(1) Management Measures for Tropical Tuna (Bigeye, Yellowfin, and Skipjack)

After confirming that the tropical tuna stocks (Bigeye Tuna, Yellowfin Tuna, and Skipjack Tuna) were in healthy condition, regarding the purse seine fishery, agreement was reached on shortening the closed period, taking into account that bigeye tuna catches are managed through vessel-by-vessel catch monitoring. Following measures will be extended up to 2028 based on scientific considerations.

【Purse Seine Fishery】

A. Closed periods

2025: 72-day annual closed period

2026: 64-day annual closed period

B. Closed periods will be extended for each fishing vessel based on the previous year's bigeye tuna catch.

2025: - 1,200 tons or more: 82 days

- 1,500 tons or more: 85 days

- 1,800 tons or more: 88 days

2026: - 1,200 tons or more: 74 days

- 1,500 tons or more: 77 days

- 1,800 tons or more: 80 days

C. FADs in use: 340 or less per vessel (unchanged from 2025)

*Measures were also taken to strengthen sampling and tagging programs to facilitate the collection of scientific information.

【Longline Fishery】 (unchanged from 2025)

Annual catch limits for bigeye tuna (55,131 tons total)

Japan 32,372 tons

South Korea 11,947 tons

Taiwan 7,555 tons

China 2,507 tons

United States 750 tons

(2) Pacific Bluefin Tuna

The results of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Northern Committee/IATTC Joint Working Group held in July this year were reported, and it was confirmed that relevant countries will continue to discuss the formulation of a new management approach.

(3) Sharks

The US proposed strengthening measures to protect silky sharks, and the EU proposed integrating and strengthening shark conservation measures, but no agreements were reached.

CCSBT annual meeting

The CCSBT Annual Meeting was held in Bali, Indonesia from October 6 to 9, 2025.

(1) Total Allowable Catch (TAC) of Southern Bluefin Tuna

The meeting discussed the total allowable catch (TAC) for the three years from 2027. The Scientific Committee recommended an increase of 3,000 tons from the current (2024-2026) amount of 20,647 tons. However, a consensus could not be reached on a review of national allocations to take into consideration coastal and developing countries, as strongly advocated by Indonesia, and the decision of the TAC from 2027 was postponed to the next meeting in 2026.

It was agreed that the current national allocations for 2026 would be maintained.

Total allowable catch and allocation by country for 2024-2026

	2024-26	(Reference) 2021-23
JAPAN	7,295t (*1)	6,245 t (*1)
Australia	7,295t (*2)	6,245 t (*2)
Korea	1,468t	1,257 t
Taiwan	1,468t	1,257 t
Indonesia	1,315t	1,095 t
NZ	1,288t	1,102 t
South Africa	500t	428 t
EU	13t	11 t
Research catch quota	6t	6 t
Total	20,647 t	17,647 t

*1 : Japan transfers 21 tons to Indonesia and 27 tons to South Africa each year.

*2: Australia transfers 7 tons to Indonesia each year. -

(2) Seabird Bycatch issues

Mandatory seabird by catch mitigation measures have been implemented, but there is a serious lack of bycatch data, and it has been decided to strengthen information gathering.

(3) The next annual meeting is scheduled to be held in Brussels, Belgium in October 2026.

OPRT seminar on fisheries resources workshop toward sustainable use and industry

OPRT held a fisheries resources workshop in Tokyo on October 10th, "Tuna Day," using a webinar. The workshop was primarily targeted at OPRT members affiliated with the National Liaison Committee of the Consumer's Organization (Consumers. Japan).

To ensure sustainable use of fisheries resources and the continued viability of fisheries and related industries amidst drastic changes in the marine environment, lecturer Ms. Chikage Yoshikawa, assistant section chief of the Fisheries Processing and Distribution Division, urged people to "eat the diverse fish currently being caught, rather than relying on specific species."

Ms. Yoshikawa explained that changes in the marine environment, such as the Kuroshio Current's large meander and global warming, are causing some fish to move away from Japanese waters in search of suitable water temperatures. She also explained that the distribution of plankton, which they feed on, is also changing.

She pointed out that survey results show that an overwhelming majority of people "like fish." However, they feel the hassle of cooking and eating them outweighs the benefits, and changes in the marine environment have led to a decline in catches of familiar seafood such as salmon, saury, and Japanese flying squid, further exacerbating the problem.

On the other hand, there are some fish species whose stocks are increasing, such as bluefin tuna. She explained that strict catch control is in place, including not only commercial fishing but also recreational fishermen's catches, to ensure that catches stay within Japan's allocated catch limit.

Tuna is not only great as sashimi or sushi; scraping the meat off the backbone and eating it is both delicious and entertaining. The impressive "tuna tree" that can be seen when tuna are unloaded from the fish hold of a deep-sea fishing boat, the world inside an ultra-low temperature refrigerator, and Japan's discerning eye for quality, a source of national pride, are also captivating. She noted that this enjoyment is an important element in encouraging consumers to choose fish, and suggested "providing a package that combines food and experience" to increase consumption.

She then explained that Japan's Fisheries Agency has designated the 3rd to 7th of each month as "Sakana (Fish) Day." More than 1,000 members supporting "Sakana (Fish) Day" are also working on developing seasonings that go well with fish. They are challenging themselves to eat fish in unconventional ways and called on ordinary consumers to "choose and eat a variety of fish."

Wild Sashimi Tuna Campaign 2025

OPRT and the All Japan Fish Retailers Union (Zen-Suishouren) held the "22nd Wild-caught and Sashimi

Tuna Campaign" from October 1st to 10th, coinciding with Tuna Day on October 10th (see poster). Participants included 101 stores from 16 associations of fresh fish retailers nationwide affiliated with Zen-Suishouren, as well as events held by tuna associations and fishermen's direct sales outlets across the country. This year, the 22nd anniversary of the campaign, they returned to their roots and adopted the slogan "October 10th is Tuna Day." In-store leaflets also included an explanatory page to draw attention to southern bluefin tuna, whose prices have plummeted.

OPRT Executive Director Mr. Hiromi Isa emphasized that while tuna resources are recovering worldwide, "the development of healthy markets is essential" for producers to operate sustainably. To that end, he stated that campaigns that involve direct interaction with general consumers and introduce tuna's appeal will play an important role.

Promoting sashimi tuna to inbound tourists. Posters created in four languages.

In order to expand the sashimi tuna market, OPRT created a poster aimed at boosting consumption among inbound tourists. English digital signage (electronic posters) has started to be displayed at Ichibamae Station on the Yurikamome Line. The organization is working to foster a healthy market that promotes sustainable management for producers.

By appealing to foreign tourists who visit Toyosu Market and are interested in fish, the posters encourage consumption of sushi and sashimi-grade tuna. With the cooperation of the Toyosu Market Association, posters in English and Chinese (simplified and traditional characters) have also been displayed in the market's PR corner.

The posters announce that October 10th is "Maguro Day." Using "MAGURO" to differentiate the sushi and sashimi grade is intended to emphasize the high quality of Japanese sashimi tuna. The newly created common "MAGURO" symbol is intended to emphasize the importance of high-quality sashimi tuna. OPRT hopes to promote the posters not only through primary consumption in Japan, but also through word-of-mouth after the customers return home.

[Sharing Promotional Materials]

Posters in four languages are available for promotional purposes for sushi and sashimi tuna. PDF files will be sent to those interested in using them. Please contact the OPRT office.

