OPRT
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FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF TUNAS

25th Anniversary: Promoting Responsible Tuna Fisheries for the Future
President: Yuji Uozumi

The Organization for the Promotion of Responsible Tuna Fisheries (OPRT) was established on December 8, 2000, and recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. Over this time, the organization has worked to "sustainably use tuna resources and maintain and develop healthy tuna fisheries." Tuna resources have generally recovered to good conditions in all ocean areas.
The OPRT's management has also curbed the number of large-scale tuna longline fishing vessels, resulting in a 40% decrease from its peak. We spoke with Yuji Uozumi, a tuna resource scientist at the forefront of resource issues and the OPRT's president since 2018, about trends in tuna resources, the role of the OPRT, current challenges, and future prospects.

Interviewer: 25 years have passed since the founding of the OPRT.

Dr. Uozumi: First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to all of our full membership of producer organizations (16 organizations from 15 countries and regions), domestic distributor and consumer organizations (4 organizations), and public interest corporations (3 organizations), as well as our many supporting members and other stakeholders for their hard work and cooperation, and the Japanese government's Fisheries Agency for its support.
Thanks to your efforts, tuna resources have generally recovered to good conditions in all ocean areas. The number of large-scale tuna longline fishing vessels has also been curbed under OPRT management, down 40% from a peak of 1,454 vessels in 2004 to 867 in 2025.

Interviewer: What was the state of tuna resources in 2000, when the OPRT was founded?

Dr. Uozumi: Looking back, tuna resources seemed to have generally bottomed out at the time. This was because the majority of resources was assessed as being in the red zone (overfished and overfishing). Excessive fishing vessels and fishing efforts were major causes. The OPRT was established in response to calls for a reduction in fishing vessels and fishing efforts.

Interviewer: Please tell us again about the background to the establishment of the OPRT.

Dr. Uozumi: In 1999, the Fisheries Committee of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) adopted an international action plan calling for a 20-30% reduction in the world's large-scale tuna longline fishing vessels. In response, Japanese fleets reduced their vessel numbers by 20%, or 132 vessels.
However, at the time, the existence of approximately 250 flag of convenience (FOC) fishing vessels, which had been registered in non-member countries of regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) and operated in disregard of international resource management measures, was a major issue. They were evading strict international regulations and engaging in illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.
To eliminate these FOC fishing vessels, Japan engaged with Taiwan, the actual operator of the FOC vessels, and the Japanese and Taiwanese industries agreed on an FOC vessel elimination plan. This required compensation for the reduction in vessels and the cost of scrapping.
Therefore, with support from the Japanese government, it was decided that the Japanese and Taiwanese industries would cover these costs. The OPRT was established as an organization to promote responsible tuna fishing, including the practical aspects of this scrapping business.
The remaining FOC fishing vessels were also transferred to RFMO member states. As a result, operations have been normalized to comply with RFMO regulations, and many tuna resources have now moved into the green zone (a fair state that is neither overfished nor overfishing).
If the decision and implementation at this time had been delayed, there is a possibility that FOC fishing vessels would have moved further to third countries, maintaining and expanding their negative influence on tuna resources.
I believe that the strong stance taken at the time, to "fundamentally eliminate FOC fishing vessels" and "use tuna resources sustainably forever," is still being put to good use under current international resource management.
Another distinctive feature of the OPRT is that its members have included not only tuna producers but also the distribution industry and consumer groups since its inception. Through a cooperative system between production, distribution and consumption, the OPRT has been able to fulfill its mission of eliminating tuna from FOC and IUU fishing vessels.

Interviewer: How did FOC fishing vessels affect you as a scientist?

Dr. Uozumi: Information about where FOC fishing vessels caught tuna, which species, and how much was not

publicly available, which meant that stock assessments lacked accuracy. This was also an issue that was raised by scientific committees. Eliminating FOC fishing vessels was a major undertaking, especially in terms of improving the reliability of stock assessments.
The basis of resource management is "sticking to what's been decided." With all large-scale longline fishing vessels now under the management of RFMOs, stocks have recovered to a degree that would have been unimaginable 25 years ago.

Interviewer: Why was this rapid recovery possible?

Dr. Uozumi: I think it's because producers felt a sense of crisis after the deterioration of resources caused real damage, such as reduced tuna catches. Optimizing management before the pain is felt is actually surprisingly difficult. Producers are reluctant to take serious action.
That said, there has been an increasing number of cases where, even after the total allowable catch (TAC) is set, regulations have not been enacted due to issues such as national allocations. In a recent example, the Scientific Committee recommended an increase in the TAC for Atlantic bigeye tuna in 2021. However, agreement was slow to be reached between developed fishing nations, like Japan and the EU, and African coastal countries, which demanded a significant increase in national allocations. An agreement was finally reached in 2024. Similar issues are occurring in the Indian Ocean and elsewhere.
Among member states, emerging coastal nations have not experienced the pain of the past. Furthermore, they have a strong desire to develop their countries through fishing. Recently, there has been an increasing number of cases where national allocations have not worked out due to conflict with traditional deep-sea fishing nations, who do not want to repeat the same mistakes.

Interviewer: Resource management methods are becoming more diverse.

Dr. Uozumi: One example is management procedures (MPs), first introduced for southern bluefin tuna, which automatically calculate TACs from specified input data. MPs do not allow arbitrary factors. The results are generally accepted unless there are significant exceptions. They have been adopted for Atlantic bluefin tuna, albacore and swordfish in the North Atlantic, skipjack tuna, bigeye tuna, and swordfish in the Indian Ocean, and skipjack tuna and Pacific albacore in the Pacific. There are also efforts to expand it to other fish species, such as sharks.
However, there are some fish species where TACs continue to be exceeded without the aforementioned national quotas being determined and effective management measures being taken. Perhaps due to changes in the marine environment, these species are not currently in a state of overfishing. Effective regulations based on TACs must be enacted as soon as possible.
For this reason, even if an MP is introduced, it is not guaranteed to be successful, as was the case with southern bluefin tuna. Naturally, adhering to the established TAC is a fundamental prerequisite.

Interviewer: Would you say that the resource situation has largely recovered from the "urgent crisis" it was in 25 years ago?

The stock status of tuna resources around the world

In 2003

Species／Ocean	Atlantic		Pacific		Indian Ocean
Bluefin tuna	East	West			
Southern bluefin tuna					
Bigeye tuna			East	West	
Yellowfin tuna			East	West	
Albacore	North	South	North	South	

In 2025

Species／Ocean	Atlantic		Pacific		Indian Ocean
Bluefin tuna	East	West	Almost recovered !		
Southern bluefin tuna	Almost recovered !				
Bigeye tuna			East	West	※
Yellowfin tuna			East	West	※
Albacore	North	South	North	South	

Overfished	Becoming overfished (Recovering)	Appropriate／Regulated (Fully used)	Catch could be increased

※ Although the stock is healthy, catches still exceed the TAC.
Therefore, a reduction in fishing effort (reducing vessels) is necessary to maintain the stock be healthy.

Dr. Uozumi: While there are still management issues, I'd say the resource status is generally appropriate. The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) determined that Indian Ocean bigeye tuna resources are almost in the green zone in its latest assessment, updated in October 2025.
On the other hand, even as resources recover and TACs are increased, the poor financial performance of tuna fisheries, particularly large-scale longline fishing vessels, is due to market issues. Japan, a major consumer of tuna sashimi, has seen a steady increase in the amount of farmed tuna distributed compared to 25 years ago. The distribution of competing salmon is also increasing.
As Japan's sashimi market itself has shrunk gradually, tuna prices are stagnating due to an oversupply. Meanwhile, fuel, labor, and feed costs continue to rise, further worsening business conditions.
Twenty-five years ago, Japanese tuna fishermen believed that if resources could be restored, "good times would return," so they abided by regulations and endured. However, the reality is that even if catches increase, business is still struggling.

Interviewer: What role does the OPRT play in ensuring responsible tuna fishing for the future?

Dr. Uozumi: Resources must be maintained and managed properly for all eternity. Furthermore, without fair prices and consumption levels to ensure a healthy market, the

health of the fishing industry cannot be guaranteed. Our role in achieving both the "sustainable use of tuna resources" and our other goal of "maintaining and developing a healthy tuna fishing industry" is becoming increasingly important. The OPRT is committed to helping in any way we can.

The OPRT's Current Status and Priority Issues
A Globally Expanding Membership Network

The OPRT was established in 2000 with eight founding members, including four fishermen's organizations in Japan (3) and Taiwan (1). Since then, it has called for cooperation from the world's major longline fishing nations and fishers, and fishermen's organizations from South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, and China have joined. Currently, the organization has expanded to 15 countries and 16 fishermen's organizations, including South American, Oceanian, and African countries.
With the addition of developing coastal countries newly embarking on tuna fishing, the organization now encompasses the world's largest large-scale tuna longline fleet. The number of registered fishing vessels reached a peak of 1,454 in 2004, but as of the end of March 2013, it had fallen by approximately 40% to 867. Why is the number of member organizations increasing despite the decline in the number of fishing vessels? The primary reason is that many countries have agreed with the OPRT's founding and purpose, and have been able to achieve capacity management for longline fishing vessels.
Furthermore, Japan, the world's largest market for sashimi tuna, has a system in place that restricts the import of tuna only to those caught through appropriate fishing practices. In order to export tuna caught by each country's longline vessels to Japan, they must be certified as not engaging in FOC or IUU fishing. The trend of "first becoming a member of the OPRT" emerged naturally, and it appears to have become almost an unwritten law.
The existence of the OPRT has also proven effective in ensuring the sustainable use of resources for the national organizations that manage large-scale longline fishing vessels. Reaching a shared awareness of "complying with the rules in order to export to the Japanese market" and "not causing losses to those engaged in the fishing industry honestly" has become an essential tool in realizing a healthy fishing industry.
However, it is not the case that anyone who agrees with the aims of the OPRT can become a member. As a rule, only one organization can be endorsed by each country's government. It is important to emphasize that the number of members has not simply increased over the past 25 years, but that these members are reliable too.

OPRT Full membership (As of December 2025)
【Producer Association】
Japan Tuna Fisheries Co-operative Association
National Offshore Tuna Fisheries Association of Japan
Taiwan Deepsea Tuna Longline Boatowners and Exporters Association
Korea Overseas Fisheries Association (Tuna Long-Line Fisheries Committee)
Philippine International Tuna Longline Association
Indonesia Tuna Association (ASTUIN)
China Overseas Fisheries Association
Foundation for the Promotion of Responsible Tuna Fisheries (Ecuador) (FUNDATUNA)
Deepsea Fisheries Management Ltd. (Republic of Seychelles)
Federated States of Micronesia National Offshore Fisheries Association (FSM-NOFA)
Nareau Tuna Boat Owners Association Incorporated (Republic of Kiribati)
Marshall Islands Tuna Fisheries Association
Ming Dar Fishery (Vanuatu) Co., Ltd.
Cook Islands Commercial Fishing Association Inc.
Kenya Tuna Fisheries Association
Malaysia Tuna Association
【Distributor and Consumer Association】
All Japan Fish Wholesalers' Union of Central Wholesale Market
National Federation of Middle Wholesaler's Association for Aquatic Products (All Japan Fish Brokers Union)
All Japan Fish Retailers Union
National Liaison Committee of Consumer's Organization
Overseas Fishery Cooperation Foundation of Japan
【Public Interest Corporation】
Japan Fisheries Association
Japan Fisheries Resource Conservation Association

Developing a Healthy Market
Developing Global Demand

Since its inception, the OPRT has been working with distribution and consumer groups to foster healthy markets, with the aim of ensuring sustainable management for producers.
To cultivate new demand for sashimi tuna and boost consumption by inbound tourists, posters were created in September of 2025 in four languages: English, Chinese (simplified and traditional), and Korean. By labeling the sushi and sashimi grade as "MAGURO," the posters differentiate the product and emphasize Japan's high-quality tuna. For promotional purposes, PDF copies of the posters are also being sent to those who request them.
The English version is also displayed on digital signage (electronic posters) at Shijo-mae Station (Toyosu) on the Yurikamome Line. The aim is to encourage tuna consumption through sushi and sashimi, especially among international travelers who are interested enough in fish to visit Toyosu Market. The OPRT's Managing Director, Hiromi Isa, predicts that if more countries feel that "we want to be able to eat such delicious tuna in our own country," it will lead to expansion of the overseas market.
Tuna is eaten in a variety of ways. In addition to cooked dishes such as steak, consumption of raw tuna, such as in salads, carpaccio, and poke, is also becoming popular. However, Isa asserts that "sashimi-grade tuna distributed through Japan's ultra-low temperature (-60°C) cold chain has a unique deliciousness and value." Construction of ultra-low temperature refrigerators is already underway in Taiwan, China, South Korea, and other countries, and conveyor-belt sushi restaurants are becoming increasingly popular.
To spread the value of sashimi-grade tuna more globally, the development of cold chains is essential. In the European Union, ultra-low temperature refrigerators have begun operation in mainland Spain and the Las Palmas Islands, and exports from Japanese ships have begun. However, the scale is still small at present. However, there is a great possibility that the experience of eating ultra-frozen tuna on a small scale, in addition to steaks and salads, will lead to an increase in demand for delicious tuna sashimi.
According to Managing Director Isa, a survey by the Japan Tuna Fisheries Co-operative Association showed that ultra-low temperature frozen tuna caught by longline fishing vessels from OPRT member countries accounted for approximately 63% of Japan's sashimi market in 2013, and remained at nearly 60% in 2024. Japan's overall supply of sashimi tuna has decreased from approximately

300,000 tons in 2013 to approximately 260,000 tons, and while farmed tuna and fresh catches from coastal vessels are increasing, demand for wild-caught ultra-low temperature frozen tuna remains solid. Because the fishing industry continues to play an important role, Isa emphasized, "We must tell the world that there is even more delicious wild-caught tuna for sashimi."

ICCAT annual meeting

The ICCAT Annual Meeting (the 29th Regular Meeting of the Commission) was held in Seville (Spain) from November 17 to 24, 2025.

1.Bluefin tuna

The new Total Allowable Catch (TAC) was agreed for the Western Atlantic and Eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna stocks based on existing management procedures The TACs have been set at 3,081.6 tons for the Western Atlantic stock and 48,403 tons for the Eastern Atlantic stock for the period 2026-2028, representing 13% and 19.3% increase in the TAC, respectively.

(1)Western Atlantic bluefin tuna

Annual TAC for 2026-2028: 3,081.6 t

United States	1,509.98 t
Canada	623.72 t
Japan	762.39 t
United Kingdom (in respect of Bermuda)	7.09 t
France (in respect of St. Pierre & Miquelon)	7.09 t
Mexico	171.34 t

(2) Eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna

48,403 t shall be allocated in 2026 to 2028 in accordance with the following scheme:

C P C	Annual Quota in2026-2028 (t)
Albania	457.37
Algeria	2,443.64
China	286.15
Egypt	549
European Union	25,164.62
Iceland	253.14
Japan	3,559.41
Korea	368.93
Libya	2,950.03
Mauritania	55
Morocco	4,379.47
Namibia	55
Norway	461.38
Panama	55
Senegal	55
Syria	238
Tunisia	3,508.85
Türkiye	3,094.45
United Kingdom	230.56
Chinese Taipei	101
Subtotal	48,266
Research	20
Unallocated Reserves	117
Total	48,403

2.Bigeye

A recent stock assessment determined that the stock would not decline even if fishing continued within the current TAC. Although it was possible to increase the quota, no agreement could be reached on national allocations, so it was decided to continue last year's results until 2027.

3.Yellowfin

The Parties have not been able to agree on a TAC for yellowfin tuna, so the TAC for yellowfin tuna remains at 110,000 tons, but there is growing concern that fishing vessels operating in the Atlantic have consistently exceeded this TAC.

4.Sharks

(1) Shortfin mako shark

The commission adopted a new measure for southern Atlantic shortfin mako shark, setting a maximum mortality objective of 1,000tons.

(2)Basking shark and Great white shark

Additional conservation measures were adopted for basking shark and great white shark, prohibiting these species being retained on bord, transshipped or landing, in whole or in part.

(3)A proposal to require sharks to be landed with their fins naturally attached failed to reach agreement again this year.

WCPFC annual meeting

The 22nd session of the WCPFC Annual Meeting was held in Manila (Philippines) from December 1 to 5, 2025.

1.Albacore

The Commission adopted a management procedure (MP) for South Pacific albacore. And it was confirmed that discussions will be carried out to formulate TAC and national allocations in the future based on the MP.

2.Bycatch Issues (Seabirds, Sharks, and Sea turtles)

(1)Seabirds

A new CMM was adopted, amending the current CMM 2018-3. This revised CMM includes management measures for seabird bycatch in specific high-risk areas in the Southern Hemisphere.

(CMM 2025-05 - PROVISIONAL COPY - Conservation and Management Measure to Mitigate the Impact of Fishing on Seabirds | Monitoring and Evaluation)

(2)Sharks

Discussions were held on revising CMM 2024-05. However, no agreement was reached, and discussions will continue.

(3)Sea turtles

The implementation status of CMM2018-04 was reported. No particular discussion took place.

3.At sea transshipment, observer coverage and EM

The parties were unable to reach an agreement on the significant issues about at sea transshipment, observer coverage and EM, and decided to continue discussions. And regarding EM, it was decided that further discussions would be held at the working group meeting in 2026.

4.Crew labor standards

Follow-up discussions were held on CMM2024-06, adopted last year. The CMM will come into effect in January 2028.