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FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF TUNAS

Transforming into Competitive Business Entities

Kenji Kagawa, President of the Japan Tuna Fisheries Co-operative Association

In compliance with recommendations from the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), Japan's distant-water tuna longline fleet reduced its vessel count by 19 ships this past March. With the addition of other vessels that have withdrawn from the fishery, the current fleet size stands at just over 100 vessels.

Vessel reductions and other factors have led to a significant drop in the number of vessels targeting Southern Bluefin Tuna. The number of active vessels fell from 70 last year to 50 this year; however, the quota allocated to each vessel increased by approximately 30%.

For vessels targeting Atlantic Bluefin Tuna, the number of vessels decreased from 48 to 44—a reduction driven by factors other than the IOTC vessel reduction program. Per-vessel quotas increased by roughly 10–20% in both the eastern and western Atlantic zones, reflecting the increased total allowable catch (TAC) agreed upon by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) starting this year.

Regarding the utilization of these increased quotas: for Southern Bluefin Tuna, although the fishing season was slightly extended this year, nearly all vessels managed to fully utilize their allocations, with only a few exceptions. For Atlantic Bluefin Tuna, the season appears to be starting slightly earlier than usual, around mid-September. Association President Kagawa expressed his hope that the fleets would successfully utilize their full quotas.

Discussions regarding a quota increase for Southern Bluefin Tuna, effective from 2027, are scheduled for this year's annual meeting of the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT). Consequently, future operations may see an increase in vessels fishing across two distinct grounds—moving from waters off Cape Town or Sydney into the southern Indian Ocean.

Meanwhile, given current market prices for Bigeye and Yellowfin tuna, some operators are considering focusing Southern Bluefin fishing efforts on only the peak season while increasing their Bigeye and Yellowfin catch in nearby waters. Kagawa emphasized that this expansion of strategic options represents a crucial opportunity for companies to demonstrate their business acumen as they transform into competitive enterprises. However, a major obstacle to these decisions has been the surge in fuel prices caused by conflicts inskyrocketedst; the cost of refueling at overseas ports or at sea has skyrocketed to two or three times previous levels within just a few months.

Faced with this situation, companies are finding it difficult to decide where and for how long to allocate their operations to bigeye and yellowfin tuna fishing—activities that take place alongside the pursuit of Southern bluefin and Atlantic bluefin tuna. At the peak of fuel prices, some even considered limiting operations exclusively to the fattier, high-value tuna species. However, that bottleneck is now easing, thanks to stabilizing fuel prices, government subsidies for refueling within Japan, and the fact that bigeye and yellowfin prices have remained high in recent years.

Fishing companies are reviewing their operational plans, considering options such as staying on the fishing grounds for as long as possible or returning to Japan to refuel before heading back out. Even so, the current reality is that the duration of bigeye and yellowfin operations remains short, resulting in limited supply. Foreign vessel also activity declined following the fuel price spike. According to Kagawa, "It is a problem if certain fish stocks are depleted too much; balance is key," Consequently, frozen bigeye and yellowfin are trading at price levels unseen in recent years. While fish

prices had already been recovering since around July oflast year—a trend accelerated by this spring's fuel crisis—Kagawa emphasized that "bigeye prices, in particular, had previously been far too low."

However, one positive outcome of the recent reduction in the number of vessels and the surge in international fuel prices is that major buyers have become more conscious of the realities of running a fishing business. As Kagawa put it, "We share the view that we cannot afford to reduce our fleet any further, and I believe we have received cooperation regarding fish pricing."

While international vessel reduction efforts have significantly decreased the number of fishing vessels aged 26 years or older, older ships still remain in operation. Kagawa noted that the industry faces the challenge of addressing the mindset of business operators who have decided to continue but plan to quit once their current vessels become too old, and that it must determine how to renew its fleets and generate the necessary profits to achieve that.

The shortage of crew members remains a crucial issue despite the reduction in the number of vessels. It is essential to continue utilizing the Association's seafarer placement service and to participate in fisheries employment supporter fairs and guidance session.

Vessel owners are also encouraged to actively make use of the government's maritime officer training programs, as the industry works to secure as many individuals as possible who will obtain maritime licenses and qualifications become ship officers, and remain in the industry.

Fortunately, the number of young people interested in working at sea is on the rise, thanks in part to effective outreach via the Association's official YouTube channel (japantuna) and social media platforms. However, the issue of early departures remains a challenge. Ensuring that young people in their teens and twenties continue to work at sea will require improvements to aspects such as interpersonal relationships, living conditions on board, and working conditions.

Initiatives for Offshore Medical Support Using Digital Technology in Kesennuma City, Japan

Kesennuma City, Miyagi Prefecture, is renowned as a leading domestic base for deep-sea tuna longline and skipjack pole-and-line fisheries. In 2023, the Fisheries Agency designated the city as one of the nation's first "Digital Fisheries Strategy Hubs," and it is currently promoting the digitalization of the entire fisheries industry. Over the course of this initiative, interviews with stakeholders in the deep-sea fishing industry revealed that "offshore medical support"—rather than resource management or operational efficiency—was the most significant challenge. Because deep-sea fishing vessels operate far from land for extended periods, the onboard health officer often had to make decisions based on limited information when illness or injury occurred, placing a heavy burden on them.

Initially, the city considered implementing online medical consultations via video call, but regulatory constraints made this difficult to realize. Consequently, the focus shifted from "medical diagnosis and treatment" to "improving the quality of medical consultations." Existing medical consultation services relied on satellite phones, resulting in high call costs and limited access points, which led to low usage rates. Crew members' reluctance to let others know they were unwell also hindered uptake.

To address this, a pilot project named "Katsuo-Maguro Medical Online" was launched in August 2025, allowing crew members to consult with nurses via Zoom. However, usage remained low due to the requirement for appointments and the service being limited to weekday daytime hours. In response, the city partnered with Tokio Marine & Nichido Medical Service to establish a new 24-hour consultation system that utilizes LINE calls. By implementing a mechanism that forwards LINE calls to landlines, the city ensured that doctors and nurses could handle inquiries using their existing workflows.

In December 2025, the system transitioned to a model allowing crew members to consult for free—without appointments—directly from their own smartphones in their cabins. Of approximately 120 eligible individuals, 70 have registered on LINE, indicating a certain level of adoption despite the aging demographic of the crews. However, the consultations still frequently involve serious medical cases, meaning the service has not yet achieved the city's goal of facilitating "casual health consultations." To this end, the city is leveraging LINE to share information—such as examples of consultations and details that encourage service usage—in an effort to lower the barriers to participation.

Kesennuma City also hosts the "Fisheries DX EXPO" to promote the adoption of digital transformation (DX) in the fisheries industry. While 24 companies exhibited in

2025, the city plans to roughly double the number of participating companies this November. By providing a venue where local businesses, startups, and citizens—including high school students—can engage with cutting-edge technology, the city aims to resolve challenges in the fisheries sector, foster regional industrial development, and encourage employment among the younger generation.

Summary of the results of the IATTC Annual Meeting and the Joint WCPFC/NC and IATTC WG Meeting

The 104th Session of the IATTC annual Meeting was held in Lisbon, Portugal on August 31– September 4, 2026, and the WCPFC Northern Committee and the IATTC joint working group on Pacific Bluefin Tuna was held in Nagasaki City in Japan on July 8–11 and an online meeting on August 18.
We report on the results of these Meetings, focusing on OPRT's concerns.

1. IATTC annual Meeting

(1) Pacific bluefin tuna

The Commission adopted an interim MP (management procedures) for Pacific bluefin tuna, based on the agreement reached at the joint working group meeting of the WCPFC Northern Committee and the IATTC held in August of this year.

The Commission Adopted stock management measures based on the calculation of the MP, including the allocation of the catch limit (15,479 tons) for the Eastern Pacific between the United States and Mexico for the two-year period of 2027 and 2028.

United States: 1,822 tons (current) → 1,945 tons (2027 and 2028)
Mexico: 10,763 tons (current) → 11,256 tons (2027 and 2028)
*The overall catch limit for the Eastern Pacific, including recreational fishing, is 15,479 tons.

(2) Tropical Tuna (Bigeye, Yellowfin, and Skipjack)

As no agreement was reached on the formulation of a Management Procedure (MP) for tropical tunas, current measures for purse seine fisheries and the annual catch limit for bigeye tuna for longline fisheries will be extended until 2028 at the latest, based on scientific review.

【Longline Fishery】 (unchanged from 2026)
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

(3) Sharks

Regarding shark conservation and management measures, no agreement was reached on reviewing alternative measures for the retention of fins and carcasses and on the handling of revised release guidelines; consequently, it was decided to extend the current measures for one year.

(4) Human observer and EM system

No agreement was reached on a schedule to phase in the expansion of human or electronic monitoring systems on longline vessels exceeding 20 meters in length; consequently, the requirement for human observer coverage of at least 5% remained unchanged. However, regarding the future use of EM (electronic monitoring) systems on longline vessels, it was agreed that IATTC scientific staff would review EM data submitted by CPCs (members and cooperating non-members) in 2027.

(5) Other matters

There was no significant progress regarding the issues of seabird and sea turtle bycatch.
No specific discussion took place regarding the Crew Laboure issue.

2. WCPCF Northern Committee/IATTC Joint Working Group

A joint working group of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Northern Committee and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) met in Nagasaki City from July 8 to 11 and held an online meeting on August 18 to reach an agreement on a new stock management framework and catch limits for Pacific bluefin tuna. While formal adoption at the respective annual meetings of the IATTC and WCPFC is still required, the catch limits for Pacific bluefin tuna for the two-year period of 2027–2028, calculated based on this framework, are as follows:

○ Western and Central Pacific: Large fish: 29,672 tons (14,836 tons/year; current: 11,869 tons); Small fish: 9,646 tons (4,823 tons/year; current: 5,125 tons).

○ Eastern Pacific: 15,480 tons (7,740 tons/year; current: 7,581 tons).

Agreement was reached on the following measures regarding the conversion factor for transferring quota from the small-fish category to the large-fish category:

○ For the 2027–2028 period, Japan may apply a new conversion factor (×6.37) to up to 20% of its small-fish quota, and South Korea to up to 35% of its small-fish quota (transfers exceeding these percentages will use the current conversion factor of ×1.47).

The 23rd Wild Sashimi Tuna Campaign 2026

On September 24, 2026, The OPRT held a press conference at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan and issued a press release regarding the 23rd Wild Sashimi Tuna Campaign. The related events are outlined below.

1.Wild Sashimi Tuna Campaign "October 10th is Tuna Day"

The OPRT, with the cooperation of the All Japan Fish Retailers Union (Zen-Suishouren), will once again hold the "Wild Sashimi Tuna Campaign" from October 1st to 10th this year, primarily at around 90 fresh fish retailers nationwide.

The campaign will also be held by tuna fishermen throughout Japan in conjunction with Tuna Day, as well as at fishermen's direct sales outlets.

While opportunities to eat sashimi tuna have declined since the COVID-19 pandemic due to rising commodity prices, the campaign will continue with the slogan "October 10th is Tuna Day," with the aim of making tuna more familiar to consumers.

2.Tuna Seminar (OPRT Seminar)

The OPRT, in cooperation with the National Liaison Committee of Consumer's Organizations (Zenkoku Shodanren), will hold a seminar in Tokyo on October 9. The theme of the seminar is "The Role and Responsibilities of Intermediate Wholesalers in Tuna Distribution" (tentative title). Two board members of the Tokyo Toyosu Market Large Fish Wholesalers Group will be the guest speakers.

The purpose of this seminar is to help the general public gain a better understanding of how fresh and delicious tuna reaches their dining tables. The speakers will discuss the roles and functions of intermediate wholesalers in the sashimi tuna supply chain, as well as the challenges they face in their daily work.

3.Promotion for Foreign Visitors to Japan

To increase the consumption of wild and frozen tuna among foreign visitors to Japan, we will create posters and other promotional materials in foreign languages with catchphrases such as "Sushi & Sashimi-grade premium tuna" and "Taste the King of Japanese seafood!" to promote the products.