

# OPRT

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FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF TUNAS

OPRT Interview

## Warning Against Rapidly Expanding Tuna Farming

—Interview with Dr. Makoto Miyake,  
the former Assistant Executive Secretary of ICCAT—

Few people understand all about tunas. Dr. Peter Makoto Miyake is one of those few. He is one of the architects of the present framework of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT), which is considered the most advanced tuna resource management framework. Dr. Miyake has recently expressed his warning against tuna farming, which has been drastically increasing its production during the past few years. What follows is an excerpt from an interview with Dr. Miyake, who has kept a close eye on the developments in the world's tuna resources.

**QUESTION:** We understand you have been involved with ICCAT ever since its establishment. ICCAT now enjoys a high reputation as an advanced international resource management organization. Can you tell us about it?

MIYAKE: I had been with ICCAT for 32 years as Assistant Executive Secretary. I am confident that I dedicated considerable efforts in making ICCAT's framework. First, we placed an emphasis on establishing a reliable data collection system. Compilation of basic fishery and biological data is the foundation of resource management. With regard to the resource assessment method, we established a system where scientists pre-select one assessment model and agree upon input parameters, before we carry it out. This enabled a far more transparent assessment than when individual States assess populations using their own parameters at their own discretion. The method of resource management established at ICCAT has now become the standard and

has been implemented by various regional international fisheries resource management organizations.



Dr. Miyake

**QUESTION:** You are quite knowledgeable about tuna farming. Do you have any comments on this controversial practice?

MIYAKE: As I had been consulted by tuna farmers from the beginning, I have closely observed the development of tuna farming. In tracing the history of tuna farming, we find that the first case was the farming of bluefin tuna caught in traps in northeastern Canada in the 1960s. In the latter half of 1970s, farming of slim bluefin tuna caught after spawning in the Mediterranean Sea began and was successful. In the 1980s, southern bluefin tuna farming began in Australia using a new technology that enhanced the efficiency of farming

drastically. This technique was transferred to the Mediterranean and spread rapidly and widely throughout this area. Now, tuna farming is conducted in Spain, Italy, Croatia, and Malta. In 2001, Turkey was a new entrant, along with Libya and Tunisia. Cyprus, Lebanon, and Israel reportedly have interest in launching tuna farming production.

**QUESTION:** Is it true that farm production in the Mediterranean exceeded 20,000 tons last year, which caused a sharp fall in the price of tuna?

MIYAKE: Many countries launched tuna farming because of the high market price in the Japanese market, and this was encouraged by Japanese companies. This caused a sharp increase in production and led to a crash in prices. Tuna farming has had a substantial impact on tuna resources, and I am very concerned about the present situation.

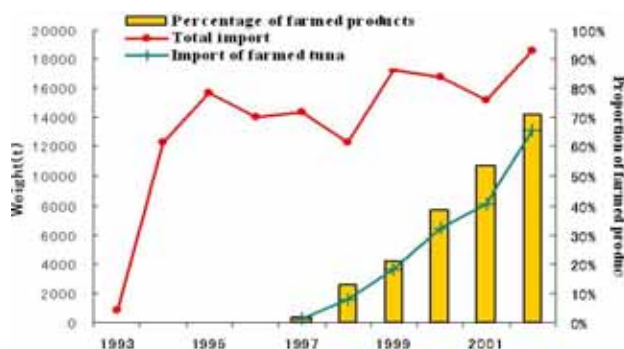
**QUESTION:** Can you elaborate on that point?

MIYAKE: The first problem is that we don't know who caught what amount of those tuna used in farming or where the catches took place. Of course, we know the amount of tuna shipped from farming grounds after they are raised in the cages. But we have little information about what size of tuna was caught and in what amount at the initial stage, as well as how many tuna died in the course of these activities. As a matter of fact, the problem is serious because the actual catch calculated back from the shipment does not match the quotas. In other words, part of farmed tuna is suspected to be produced outside the framework of resource management. That means some people are operating in violation of the regulations. No accurate stock assessment is possible if such a black box exists. In the worst case, it could be that we are seeing this problem too late and the stock could be irreparably damaged.

**QUESTION:** Do you mean that production of farmed tuna exerts direct pressures on the tuna resources?

MIYAKE: There had been no problem when slim tunas after spawning were farmed on a small scale. However, as production has increased to the present volume, there won't be sufficient tunas to meet the demand. Production cannot be continued unless small-

Comparison of imports of Mediterranean bluefin tuna and farmed tuna in Japan



size tunas are harvested. Therefore, fishing pressures on small- and medium-size tunas have increased. This creates a serious problem in terms of conservation of the resources. Further, strong concerns have been expressed about the possible impact of tuna farming on the environment, and environmental groups are calling for a total prohibition of tuna farming.

**QUESTION:** Is it true that such a concern was also expressed in ICCAT and ICCAT has decided to apply the Positive List Scheme also to tuna farming?

MIYAKE: Most countries are aware of the seriousness of the issue. The consequences of the expansion of tuna farming in the Mediterranean, a spawning ground for tuna, are immense. ICCAT adopted a recommendation to call on Japan, a country having the largest market of farmed tuna, to urge Japanese companies not to encourage countries concerned to activate their tuna farming. This recommendation has clarified that Japan is also responsible for the issue of tuna farming. It is in a way a recommendation directed at the Japanese people, including consumers of tuna. Needless to say, not only the market countries are responsible—the producing countries have a greater responsibility. Both market countries and producing countries should recognize that, if the present situation persists, a truly severe blow will be given to the tuna resources. Farmed tuna represents a small portion compared to the overall production volume of sashimi tuna, including other species of tuna. However, since the products are almost all fat meat (“toro”), it is true that tuna farming has a greater impact than in terms of quantities, and could lead to the disruption of the supply-

and-demand balance of tuna on a global scale. We should have a stronger awareness of this fact.

**QUESTION:** Then, what role can the OPRT play to cope with this issue?

MIYAKE: The OPRT's activities to date to reduce the number of IUU tuna fishing vessels (See note) have been highly evaluated. The OPRT's activities have come to be known worldwide. However, the role of the OPRT has just started. It has an important mission to establish an orderly

flow of the supply of tuna to markets and to ensure tuna is harvested in a responsible manner. Also, I think that it is the role of the OPRT to work to make longline fishing friendlier to the environment and to promote tuna as the healthy food that it is. I think the OPRT is expected to normalize the current unfavorable situation caused by tuna farming.

(Note) *IUU tuna fishing vessels* = fishing vessels engaging in illegal, unregulated and unreported tuna fishing operation.

Symposium

## Active Debate Held on the Impact of Rapid Increase of Large-scale Purse-seine Fishing

### —Kesenuma Symposium—

A symposium was held in Kesenuma, one of Japan's major tuna landing ports, on March 30, 2004 under the theme: "Is the Future of Tunas Ensured?—The impact of the rapid increase in international purse-seine fisheries on resource management." At the symposium, participant after participant expressed concerns about the rising fishing pressure on juvenile tuna caused by the recent rapid increase in the number of large-scale purse-seine fishing vessels in the Pacific.

The symposium featured a keynote speech by Dr. Ziro Suzuki, Chief of the Pelagic Fish Resource Division, the National Research Institute of Far Seas Fisheries, on the theme of "Present Situation and Issues of Large-scale Purse-seine Fishing." In the panel discussion that followed, Mr. Yuichiro Harada, Managing Director of the OPRT, made a presentation, an essence of which is given below.

"Tunas are highly migratory fish species. They do not live only in the national coastal areas but move extensively in the oceans of the world, such as the Pacific, the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic. For the conservation and management of these resources, all the nations and industries concerned should join forces.

While Japan reduced the number of its distant-water longline tuna fishing vessels in order to restore the overfished tuna stock, the IUU fishing vessels not abiding by the

rules render the efforts of Japan null and void. The OPRT has been making utmost efforts to eliminate IUU fishing vessels with cooperation not only of major producers in the world engaging in tuna longline fishing but also all the stakeholders including traders, distributors and consumers in Japan.

Thanks to these cooperative efforts, catch from IUU fishing vessels came to be excluded from international trade. We need to continue our efforts to monitor trade in tuna products in order to ensure the elimination of the IUU fishing.

Secondly, Japanese longline tuna fishermen have expended leading but painful efforts, and reduced as many as 132 vessels ahead of any other country in the world.

Further, Japanese tuna fishermen, with cooperation of Taiwanese tuna fishermen, have taken the initiative to establish the OPRT to eliminate IUU fishing vessels and have reached the point where the Positive List Scheme was introduced in a global scale. I believe it is only longline tuna fishermen who profess to assume the responsibility by themselves and actually engage in concrete actions.

Our concern is whether these efforts of OPRT members will bear fruit in the future. Notably, there are concerns that catch of small-size tuna by large-scale purse-seine

fishing vessels may decrease the number of parent fish. In the Pacific, we are witnessing a rapid increase in the catch by purse-seine fishing vessels.

Such development should not go unnoticed under the present circumstances where the efforts by fishermen through OPRT are beginning to produce expected results.

Reportedly, moves to increase large-scale purse-seine fishing vessels will intensify in the form of flag-of-convenience fishing vessels. Leaving these activities out of

regulations would mean that serious issues will occur not only for longline tuna fishermen but also all the people related to purse-seine fisheries in the future.

Sustainable utilization of tuna resources is the goal all fishermen pursue in common, whether they are longline fishermen or purse-seine fishermen. It is crucial to establish a responsible system regarding management and regulation of the capacity of purse-seine fishing as well and take concerted actions toward this goal.

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*Tidbits on Sharks*

## Species of Sharks

by Dr. Sharks

**N**owadays, we hear active discussion on the conservation of living resources. Especially, the debate has been extended recently to the protection of sharks—a species long considered to be “rogues of the sea.” As one who has been devoted to the studies of sharks for many years, the arguments, such that “sharks are in an endangered state” or “sharks may go extinct” or “sharks should be fully protected” sound a little bit out of place. I cannot resist the temptation to ask: “Which species of sharks are to be protected?” or “Which species are likely to go extinct?”

The fact is that there are as many as 400 species of sharks. Sharks and rays combined are called elasmobranch. As there are about 800 species of rays, the combined number of species of elasmobranch amounts to 1,200. From this we can easily understand that to say simply “sharks will go extinct” is a very rough remark.

In a similar vein, dolphins and whales combined are called cetaceans and a conservative estimate shows that there are about 200 different species. Most thriving among marine vertebrates are teleosts (a class or sometimes a subclass that contains almost all existing jawed fishes), which number about 20,000 species. I said “thriving” and it is proper to say so. All kinds of fish are dispersed and adapting themselves to the ocean environment, from shallow water to deep water and from coastal area to the pelagic sea. Human

beings are utilizing fish only in a very small portion as compared with the vast totality of biomass. Sharks also adapt themselves to all areas of the oceans from shallow to deep seas and from coastal and offshore areas, but evolved differently from teleosts. For example, they became big in size so that they may not be preyed upon by other predators, and developed sharp teeth and robust jaws to find food taking advantage of few chances. It is highly unlikely that the creatures which have adapted themselves deftly to the environment over a long period of time will go extinct easily. However, the present priority in trend is toward concern for the environment. It may be necessary not to spare our effort in collecting minimum data and accurately understanding the state of the population of sharks.

### **Tuna Longline Fishing Meets the Challenge—OPRT Brochure**

A new OPRT brochure on tuna longline fishing was published. This brochure shows that longline fishing is an effective and environmentally-friendly way to harvest seafood. It gives some information on international efforts to eliminate IUU tuna fishing activities. Also, the success story of finding solutions to incidental catch problems of seabird is told. Efforts to alleviate bycatch of sharks and sea turtles are also noted. We believe this new brochure will be helpful in our efforts to show the truth about longline fishing (The brochure is on the website: <http://www.oprt.or.jp>)