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IUU Fisheries Working Forum

Joint recommendation on the introduction of measures to prevent the import and the domestic catch and circulation of IUU seafood in Japan

The negative impacts of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing on Japanese fishermen have been increasingly highlighted in recent years. For instance, Japanese squid fishermen are being forced to change their fishing grounds or cease activities due to the illegal operation of foreign squid-fishing boats in the Sea of Japan. In addition, overfishing of fisheries resources such as mackerel, partially due to illegal operations by foreign fishing vessels, has been reported in the North Pacific off the coast of Japan.

In addition to illegal operations by foreign vessels, there have been reports of illegal fishing and trade in Japan, especially concerning glass eels and sea cucumber. A study published last year showed that a large number of the seafood entering the Japanese market is at high risk of being of IUU origin. The circulation of seafood from illicit or non-transparent sources not only threatens the sustainable use of fisheries resources and undermines the credibility of Japan's fishing industry in the global market, but also exposes Japanese fishermen who operate legally to unfair competition.

We welcome that discussions on how to turn Japanese fisheries into a growth industry at the Regulatory Reform Promotion Council, which began last year, included the topics of ensuring traceability of seafood traded within the Japanese market and countermeasures against illicit fishing activities, such as IUU fishing. In a speech he gave in May 2018, Prime Minister Abe stated that the illegal catch of marine fishery resources has increased threefold in the last 40 years. In order to eliminate IUU fishing activities such as this, it is important to prevent the circulation of illicitly sourced seafood, in addition to strengthening fisheries enforcement in Japanese waters. There is also growing interest in the procurement of legal and

sustainable seafood in Japan in the run-up to the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games.

We believe that there is an urgent need to establish a framework to prevent the distribution of IUU seafood products and ensure traceability in the seafood supply chain in Japan, both of which have become essential in the global fisheries market. This would also ensure that fishing will continue to make a critical contribution to Japan's economy and local communities. Other benefits such measures could bring about by utilizing information technology include fairer allocation of catch limits based on accurate and timely reports of catch production, improved efficiency of fisheries-related businesses, and communication of a broader range of information to the consumer.

For the above reasons, we believe that the Japanese government should introduce the following systems:

- A system which enables verification that the seafood product being imported does not originate from IUU fishing, to prevent IUU seafood caught overseas from entering the Japanese market; and
- A system which ensures complete traceability in the seafood supply chain in Japan, to prevent the circulation in the Japanese market of seafood originating from IUU fishing outside of Japan.

Through the introduction of the above systems domestically, together with international cooperation, we think it is important to aim toward establishing a framework that allows for consistent traceability throughout the supply chain, both inside and outside of Japan.

Furthermore, we recommend the following as key elements for the proposed systems.

1. Import controls on IUU seafood

Reporting to the government and verification

- To require that information on catches, landings of fish, and the placement of fish into aquaculture ponds (for example species name, weight, fishing vessel,

fishing method, catch area, catch date, and port of landing) be reported by electronic means to the government, as well as information on transactions up to the point of importation into Japan.

- To ensure appropriate verification that the imported seafood product does not originate from IUU sources. (In doing so, we request that the government take into consideration comparable efforts in other countries which require the submission of a catch certificate validated by the flag state of the fishing vessel, or verification of information by the importer. Moreover, we request that the government secure the necessary budget and personnel for its implementation.)

Scope of scheme

- To cover all species. To prioritize species at a higher risk of IUU, such as tuna, crab, eel, flatfish and squid.
- To cover aquaculture products (and the raw ingredients used in the feed) and processed goods.

Establishing a framework for international cooperation

- To hold intergovernmental dialogues with countries with an insufficient governance structure to encourage the implementation of effective fisheries and seafood distribution management systems, ensuring the accuracy of the information submitted to the government on seafood imports.
- To proactively coordinate with international initiatives to strengthen the consistency of recording and reporting requirements.

2. A domestic traceability system

Refining the system to report catch information of domestic seafood to the government

- To require that information on catches, landings of fish, and the placement of fish into aquaculture ponds (for example species name, weight, fishing vessel, fishing method, catch area, catch date, and port of landing) be promptly reported by electronic means to the government, in principle for all species, including both fisheries licensed by the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and those licensed by a prefectural governor.

Ensuring accuracy of submitted information

- To implement a system to ensure that the information submitted to the government is accurate by, for example, requiring both the fisherman and wholesale market to report information; introducing a system which allows verification of information by a third party; or equipping fishing vessels with vessel monitoring systems, while being mindful of information privacy.

Recording and relaying information

- To establish a system that requires the communication of information on each domestic and imported seafood product lot to the next operator throughout the supply chain from catch/import to retail stage.
- To require all operators throughout the supply chain to record and keep information on the immediate supplier and the immediate recipient of the seafood product.

Scope of scheme

- To cover all species. To take into account factors such as high risk of IUU (for example species such as tuna, crab, eel, flatfish, squid and sea cucumber), high commercial value, and high trade volume, and to prioritize those species.
- To cover aquaculture products (and the raw ingredients used in the feed) and processed goods.

Reducing the burden on operators

- To proactively reduce the burden on operators by constructing a centralized government database and/or offering support to operators for installing IT systems when implementing the requirements to relay and record seafood information.
- To arrange training sessions, etc., for fishermen and companies to support their efforts to implement traceability.

In considering the above, we also think it is imperative that the government take into account measures necessary to ensure the effective and complete implementation of the systems, and secure a new stable source of funding by 2020, in preparation for the introduction of import controls and a domestic traceability scheme to prevent the

circulation of IUU seafood in the Japanese market. In order to reinforce this consideration process, we request that the government arrange opportunities for open discussions with stakeholders such as fishermen, fisheries-related operators, researchers, and NGOs.