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produced by The Japan Times Cube

sustainable japan

Sailors for the Sea Japan charts conservation course

Roundtable

JOE MUNTAL
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Not far from Japan's busiest international airport, Narita, is the temple Naritasan Shinshoji. On a fateful day in 2012, Minako Iue visited this temple with two high-profile guests — David Rockefeller Jr. and Susan Rockefeller, both active environmentalists — whom had she befriended during a visit to New York a few years earlier.

Although it isn't situated near a body of water, the temple complex features replicas and engravings of fish. Admiring these representations of marine wildlife, David — who founded the ocean conservation organization Sailors for the Sea in 2004 — commented on the unfortunate lack of awareness in Japan regarding the dangers of the depletion of fish stocks.

This lack of awareness is striking for a nation that accounts for only 2 percent of the world's population yet is the world's third-largest consumer of seafood. The dire circumstances of the supply of fish in Japanese waters are even more striking. According to Iue, due to overfishing and damage to marine habitats, around 20 percent of stocks



Sailors for the Sea Japan Chair and CEO Minako Iue established the group in 2011 as an affiliate of the ocean conservation NGO Sailors for the Sea. HIROMICHI MATONO

assessed in Japan are currently regarded abundant.

Following his remark, David took out a card showcasing Seafood Watch — a well known program founded and operated by Monterey Bay Aquarium — from his wallet and showed it to Iue, who had established the affiliate group Sailors for the Sea Japan in 2011 "That was a moment of truth for us," she recalled during a Roundtable talk event by The Japan Times on Nov. 25, hosted by Ross Rowbury. Iue turned to David and Susan and said, "Let's do that in Japan."

Iue describes the mission of Sailors for the Sea Japan as to "increase awareness and give opportunities to learn about the protection of marine resources so we can pass on this beautiful planet to the next generation." The effects of overfishing and marine habitat damage are largely invisible to ordinary people, as they manifest deep in the ocean. This is why it is important to promote awareness of sustainable fishing efforts among government agencies and consumers before it is too late, she said.

Guides to 'blue seafood'

Iue initiated the publication of the group's Blue Seafood Guides the following year, and they are now central to its efforts. The guides include national and regional editions listing seafood varieties that are managed sustainably. Also there is a list of collaborating members such as hotels and restaurants committed to serving sustainably procured fish. Iue hopes to make "blue seafood" a common term among consumers, empowering them with the information needed to make choices that contribute to conservation efforts.

She noted that although government policy is an important part of ensuring sustainable fishing, it is consumers who have the most leverage. "The government and administrative people have the key," she said, "but the most important decision-makers are the consumers. They are the ones who buy and decide what and what not to consume.



Roundtable host Ross Rowbury and Minako Iue before the roundtable HIROMICHI MATONO

The sense of value of the consumers is the most important thing, which is why we're trying to raise awareness of sustainable seafood and how to sustain the ocean and the planet."

Assessing three criteria

Sustainable fisheries are assessed according to three principles based on the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries: sustainable fish stocks; minimal environmental impact; and effective management. Fish stocks must be at a sustainable level with a scientifically proven sufficient reproductive capacity. Some bottom trawling methods are not recommended as they can destroy corals and other seabed habitats. Bycatch may also

damage the ecosystem. Iue noted that adequate precautions are required.

"Effective management" refers to whether there are management policies that produce real effects. Iue observed that some fishers in international waters come from impoverished countries and there is a fear of forced labor, which is called "modern slavery." In order for a variety of fish to be deemed sustainable, the fishers harvesting it must be working in a safe, fair environment, so that not only the stock, but also the fishermen's lives and the fishery, can be sustainable.

A major hindrance to the realization of sustainable fishing is the prevalence of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. This past Dec. 1, Japan took a monumental step toward sustainable fisheries by imple-

menting the first revisions to the Fisheries Act in 70 years. The revision include regulations for managed fisheries, for example, to increase the number of species subject to resource assessment from 50 to 200. Four days later, the Diet passed further legislation to combat IUU fishing through catch documentation schemes — a system of ensuring that fish entering the market are consistent with conservation and management measures — as well as import control rules. The words "and ensure sustainable use of marine resources" were also added to the purpose of the law.

Japan's fourth stage of fishing

"When the old Fisheries Act was established, it was an era when the priority [of

the government] was to feed people," she explained. "The government needed to focus on quantity. Then it moved on to safety and later quality. Now sustainability, the fourth stage, is coming. These changes involve a lot of people at fisheries, and the fishing industry must change all sorts of systems. People's minds also need to change."

The passage of this new law marks a significant shift toward sustainable fishing, but Iue says there is still a lot of work ahead. She points to the fact that, despite being surrounded by water, Japan doesn't have a comprehensive government body that looks after the oceans, such as NOAA in the U.S. Instead, certain maritime activities are delegated across a wide group of government bodies and agencies, including the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism; the Fisheries Agency; and the Ministry of the Environment. As she works with these various stakeholders, Iue finds herself "island-hopping" from institution to institution during her frequent visits to Kasumigaseki, the district of Tokyo where most of Japan's Cabinet ministry offices are located.

Iue hopes Japan will one day establish its own comprehensive ministry for the oceans. She noted that Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has already set into motion plans to launch a national digital agency, which will be useful in aggregating data for the fishing industry. Alluding to the need for another agency dedicated to the oceans, she remarked, "The second one is waiting."

Roundtable is a monthly series of English-language events organized by The Japan Times Cube. For more information visit <https://sustainable.japantimes.com/roundtable>



With oceans facing increasing risks, no nation is an island

ESG / SDGs

JACOB REED
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Among global environmental issues, the sustainable use of the seas is of paramount importance. About 2.4 billion people, 40 percent of the planet's population, live within 100 km of the ocean, and it can easily be argued that everyone relies on the ocean in some way, whether for sustenance, shipping or employment.

These observations were further emphasized at an open webinar on Dec. 2 to launch the policy recommendations by the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, hosted in Tokyo. This 14-country panel of heads of states and governments includes ocean states like Japan and Norway and small island countries like Palau and Fiji.

Small island countries whose economies and ways of life depend almost entirely on the ocean are the most vulnerable to rising ocean temperatures, depletion of fish stocks and continued accumulation of marine plastic. Because the global economy is linked by, for instance, the Pacific Ocean and is promoted through organizations such as APEC, the negative economic and environmental impacts that these countries face will ripple outward, affecting other countries as well.

Problems and solutions

Fish stocks continue to be depleted as the global population rises. On Dec. 4, Japan approved a law that reinforces measures to eliminate fish caught by illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing from its seafood market. As Japan is the world's second-largest consumer of seafood, individuals, retailers and the government must all be vigilant to ensure their seafood is from sustainable sources.



Generating co-benefits with local fishermen is a key to offshore wind farms in Japan. MASA-NORI KOBAYASHI



Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga addresses the webinar on Dec. 3. SASAKAWA PEACE FOUNDATION

Furthermore, marine biodiversity is dwindling due to unsustainable ocean use and plastic pollution. To combat this, the panel supported a global target of protecting 30 percent of the ocean by 2030, and Japan is aligned to pursue this goal. Japan strives to promote its Osaka Blue Ocean Vision goal of adding no plastic to the ocean by 2050, unveiled at the Group of 20 summit in 2019. Globally, 75 percent of the world's ocean lay within marine protected areas as of August 2020, according to the United Nations' Global Biodiversity Outlook report. The marine protected areas under Japan's jurisdiction was 8.3 percent. With the designation of an additional four seabed areas, such as those around the Ogasawara Islands, as marine protected areas in December last year, Japan's marine protected areas have now increased to 13.3 percent.

To address ocean sustainability issues, the panel set policy recommendations and targets. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga underpinned at the webinar Japan's goal of becoming a carbon-neutral country by 2050 in large part by generating more offshore wind power. Atsushi Sunami, president of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, sees this as an important policy direction though consensus-building, yet the pursuit of co-benefits with fishermen and local stakeholders remains a challenge to be tackled.

The panel has emphasized that to realize these goals, the responsibility of taking care of the ocean lies upon everyone's shoulders: Governments can pass laws to protect marine areas, punish illegal fishing and push for green shipping, but consumers

and businesses must also act on the issues. In particular, it is vital now for individuals to reconsider consumption of single-use plastics as well as investment patterns and to raise awareness about how everyday choices are connected to sustainable outcomes.

Japan's potential leading role

According to Masanori Kobayashi, a senior research fellow at the Sasakawa Peace Foundation's Ocean Policy Institute, Japan is uniquely poised to play a leading role toward ocean sustainability. While all nations' economies depend more or less on the health of the ocean, not all countries have strong cultural connections to it. The culture of Japanese who live in places dubbed *satoumi* — coastal areas where humans have lived in harmony with the sea for hundreds of generations — consider the ocean and the people who make their livelihoods from it as non-separable entities. The combination of Japan's heritage as an island nation and its development of innovative technologies is what places Japan in a perfect position to grasp the importance of ocean sustainability from both economic and cultural perspectives. Given this, Japan is expected to be in the vanguard of the international push toward sustainable ocean use.

In her remarks at the panel's webinar, Palau's ambassador to the U.N., Ngedikes Olai Uludong, highlighted the panel's campaign Give It 100%: "In short, we need to give the ocean 100 percent care because 100 percent of us depend on the ocean."

Satoyama ~ Authentic Japan

The venerable Fukuyama Castle is getting a grand renewal ahead of its 400th anniversary, restoring the history-scarred landmark to its Edo Period appearance.

One of Japan's top 100 castles, it was built by one of the first Tokugawa hereditary vassals, Mizuno Katsunari, in 1622 in a new castle town that now is the city of Fukuyama in Hiroshima Prefecture. The castle was a base for the daimyo's domain, Fukuyama-han, and is famed for having iron plates on the north side to protect against bullets and bombs. Under the leadership of one of the strongest warriors in Japanese history, the castle anchored Fukuyama-han in becoming a powerful feudal domain that lasted for 2½ centuries.

There are three main parts to the castle. The palace Fushimi Goten was the residence of the castle lord. It was named after Fushimi, a town that is now a ward in Kyoto, since parts of the building were brought from Fushimi Castle. Legend has it that the first Tokugawa shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, once lived in the building. The core of the castle is the iconic iron-plated tower (*tenshu*), with five-tiered and six-story. Castle towers symbolized the strength of a han and were used as a stronghold if enemies invaded. The entrance to the castle was the Sujiganegomon gate, part of the outer wall protecting against invaders. Its doorway was made with iron plates and used iron nails, rare in the Edo Period.

When examining the castle in detail, you will notice it incorporated many ideas on



Fukuyama Castle, built in 1622, is conveniently close to a shinkansen station CITY OF FUKUYAMA

how to guard against invasion. Although Fukuyama-han is known for its strength and long history, the castle also shows how the domain's numerous enemies made defense so important that the builders went to the then-sensational length of using iron plates and nails.

Fukuyama-han was dissolved in 1873 as part of the abolishment of the han system. The upper part of the castle stood intact until August 1945, when Allied attacks destroyed most of the buildings during World War II.

At the strong request of the citizens of Fukuyama, the castle was rebuilt in 1966 as a memorial to the recovery from WWII and also to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the city. The landmark is now a museum, exhibiting artworks and armor related to Fukuyama-han. However, the iron plating on the north side could not be restored, due to limited financial resources.

Five decades have passed since Fukuyama Castle was rebuilt, and there have been concerns about its resistance to earthquakes, especially since Kumamoto Castle was greatly damaged by the April 2016 earthquake in Kumamoto.

The city of Fukuyama has started a crowdfunding effort to reconstruct Fukuyama Castle. The renovations involve seismic retrofitting and adding iron plates to restore the castle's 1622 appearance before burning.

The fundraising is being conducted online, and donors will be given privileges depending on the amount given. For ¥10,000 or more, the fundraiser's name will

be engraved on one of the kawara roof tiles of the castle. Those who donate ¥40,000 or more will get their name in calligraphy on a plate to be exhibited on the top floor.

The renovation is planned to be finished in 2022, the year Fukuyama Castle will mark its 400th anniversary. The castle is expected to become an even greater landmark for the city, attracting visitors from both Japan and abroad.

In addition, there have been suggestions for providing accommodation facilities in some parts of the landmark. Since it is rare for castles to allow guests to stay, Fukuyama thought it would be a great opportunity for visitors to connect this unique experience to the other charms of the city.

Fukuyama is surrounded by vistas of mountains, rivers and the sea, and offers visitors a rich variety of foods and gourmet experiences. Furthermore, the city is famed for producing 70 percent of Japan's denim products, loved by fashion cognoscenti around the world for their high quality. Fukuyama Castle will not only attract visitors to see the historic site itself but also allow them to realize the city's other virtues. To promote the grand renewal, Fukuyama has been hosting events such as ceremonies, quiz contests and virtual reality experiences of the castle.



This article was compiled from information provided by the city of Fukuyama