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Innovation & Investment
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Japan to set sustainability efforts in Olympics spotlight



16 April 2018 Bonnie Waycott



Seafood Legacy, Kurose Suisan among leading advocates for responsible aquaculture



Both Rio de Janeiro and London – hosts of the two previous summer Games – made major strides with the Olympics in mind, and now it's Japan's turn, with the 2020 Games set for Tokyo. Some say it's a key opportunity for the country to make stronger sustainability commitments on a global stage. Photo courtesy of Seafood Legacy.

The share of cultivated fish in Japan's massive seafood market has been growing ever since the rapid development of commercial aquaculture following World War II. In the eyes of one group raising awareness of sustainable seafood across the island nation, aquaculture must take on an even bigger role.

Since 2015, Seafood Legacy has been building partnerships between environmental organizations and sustainable seafood businesses to promote healthy ocean ecosystems. Despite the scarcity of sustainable seafood initiatives in Japan, Managing Director Wakao Hanaoka is confident that times are changing.

He points to retail firms like Aeon and Seiyu that are selling more sustainable produce and fisheries companies like Maruha Nichiro that have established sustainable business policies. Even firms like Panasonic offer sustainable seafood in their corporate canteens, while the government has highlighted the need for comprehensive fishery management reform and better resource management.

With all eyes on Japan for the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo, Hanaoka – who has been involved in market campaigns aimed at protecting marine ecosystems for the past 15 years – sees a key opportunity for the country to make stronger sustainability commitments on a global stage. Both Rio de Janeiro and London – hosts of the two previous summer Games – made major strides with the Olympics in mind, and now it's Japan's turn.

"We want to offer the utmost in hospitality with sustainable seafood, i.e. sushi, in 2020," said Hanaoka. "Sushi and sashimi are symbols of Japanese cuisine. If the fish for such dishes is endangered, that's irresponsible toward future generations. As a Japanese [citizen], it's also very sad."

Hanaoka also believes aquaculture is likely to grow considerably in Japan – and worldwide – to respond to surging demand for protein amid rapid population growth. Ensuring that the industry's growth is sustainable is crucial, he said.

“Japan is seen as a major fisheries nation, but resource management has been poor,” he said. “It hadn’t been working toward sustainability, and although this is being addressed, we need considerable time. To establish sustainable fisheries in Japan, or rather a sustainable connection between society, the economy and marine environment, one role of sustainable aquaculture in Japan is to provide the necessary time and leeway.”



Yellowtail produced by Kurose Suisan in sink-and-float-type cages that prevent damage from typhoons or rough seas. Photo courtesy of Kurose Suisan.



Kurose Suisan is the first producer in Japan to commercialize the complete growing cycle for yellowtail. Courtesy photo.

One potential pathway for Japan is sustainability certification, but ecolabels are just beginning to gain a foothold. One company making the commitment is [Kurose Suisan Co., Ltd.](https://www.kurose-suisan.co.jp/) in Miyazaki Prefecture, which became the world’s first yellowtail producer to obtain Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) certification last December. Established in 2004, the company produces yellowtail in sink-and-float-type cages that prevent damage from typhoons or rough seas.

Kurose Suisan also stands out for another reason: Nine years ago it became the first producer in Japan to commercialize the complete growing cycle for yellowtail by developing artificial seedling technology for the early extraction of eggs from farmed broodstock. Kurose Suisan's technology has made it possible to harvest fish at a younger age, and during the summer, which is traditionally an off-season for yellowtail.

Kurose Yellowtail is in high demand among Japan's restaurants and retailers. Manager Shigetsugu Yamase noted the significance of the recent certification, adding that responsible fisheries and aquaculture methods are the way forward. Raising awareness for ecolabels and best practices in Japan will be a large task, he said.

Yamase said the certification is already influencing Japan's aquaculture industry to rethink its goals and is providing opportunities for producers to collaborate with organizations that aim to drive improvements.

"We must work harder, make adjustments and compromise," Yamase told the *Advocate*. "We should do more to educate consumers, so they choose sustainable products, and increase the value of certified farmed fish."

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Bonnie Waycott is a freelance writer specializing in aquaculture development and fisheries management, with a particular focus on Japan. She has a keen interest in the recovery of aquaculture in Tohoku, following the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of March 2011.

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