

First Longline Blue Shark and Swordfish Fishery Improvement Project (FIP) in Japan Launched Aiming for MSC Certification in 2026



Tokyo, Japan (March 18, 2021)

Seafood Legacy Co., Ltd., Kesenuma Distant-Water Fisheries Cooperative and Resource, Miyagi Offshore Tuna Fisheries Association and Economics and Policy Group at Iwate University have launched Japan's first longline blue shark (yoshikiri-zame) and swordfish (mekajiki) Fishery Improvement Project (FIP), "Kesenuma blue shark and swordfish longline FIP" on March 18, 2021.

Kesenuma represents the largest catch of fresh swordfish in Japan. In 2019, 73% (2,221 Mt) of the total catch in Japan (3,033 Mt) * was landed in Kesenuma. It's also known as the largest place of production of blue shark whose meat is used for surimi. Twelve vessels of offshore longline tuna fleet landing their catch at Kesenuma port will participate in this FIP. And they operate year-round in the northwestern Pacific Ocean, catching 1,323 tonnes of swordfish and 3,706 tonnes of blue sharks (2019). *Document of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fishery and records of Kesenuma fish market



Blue sharks

Heads and guts are taken out on the boat.
Fins are naturally attached when landed.



A swordfish dragged out from the ocean

According to the stock assessment conducted by “The International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-Like Species”, the main target species for the fishery, swordfish and blue sharks in the northwestern Pacific are neither overfished nor overfishing. However, many countries have been making an effort for the conservation, sustainability and transparency of the resources of shark, which are the cooperative's main catch target.

In order to demonstrate that their fishery's sustainability, and accordingly, to stabilize the fishery business and to contribute to the global sustainable fishery, the cooperative has decided to start FIP aiming for MSC certification in 2026.

Elements of Workplan

Through this FIP, we will improve the following issues identified in the MSC pre-assessment conducted by the accredited certification body, SCS.

1) Encourage stakeholders

Although there are no major concerns about the stock status of blue sharks, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) has not set important fishing policies, management standards, and catch control rules to ensure sustainable use. We will call cooperative work for the Fisheries Agency to ask for collaborative work with Taiwan which also catches blue sharks and the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) to evaluate scientific management methods.

2) Improve management confirmation method

We will ensure the conditions of the evidence materials whether the management purpose is in accordance with the precautionary principle and whether the relationship with stakeholders established transparently.

3) Improve the robustness of the information such as catch record and environmental impacts on the ecosystem

We will improve the data collection related to catch information (i.e. observer data and logbook data), and to demonstrate that the fishery is not involved in shark finning. We will also improve the system for data collection related to ecosystem impact and bycatch mitigation technology of endangered and protected species.

Overall, Seafood Legacy developed action and coordinates the implementation of the agreed action plan, and Kesenuma Distant-Water Fisheries Cooperative improves its operation on site according to the plan. Resource Economics and Policy Laboratory at Iwate University will provide scientific knowledge.

Ichiro Suzuki, Director, Kesenuma Distant-Water Fisheries Cooperative

“We, the offshore tuna longline vessels, operate in the Western and Central Pacific and catch mainly swordfish and blue sharks year-round. All of these fish are landed at our hometown, Kesenuma port and support the local economy. As for the blue shark, every part of the body, such as meat, fins, bones are utilized, and are supplied to the market domestically and internationally as local traditional

food and craft.. We will work hard on this FIP to keep our fishery sustainably and aim to acquire MSC certification while showing our progress to people all over the world."

Norimitsu Kobayashi, Director-General, Fisheries and Forestry Department, Miyagi Prefecture

"This fishery improvement project by the Kesenuma Distant-Water Fisheries Cooperative is an ambitious initiative aiming at maintaining and developing the Japanese offshore longline tuna fishery by establishing the sustainable use of swordfish and blue sharks. Kesenuma, which has the largest landing of blue sharks and swordfish has a tradition of using these fish without waste, and there are many related businesses such as processors and suppliers, so it will be a very important initiative for the region as well. Miyagi Prefecture will actively support this project for its smooth management.

Tetsuo Saitou, Director, Miyagi Offshore Tuna Fisheries Association

After experiencing the unprecedented disaster of the Great East Japan Earthquake and current grueling fight against an invisible COVID-19, we strongly recognized once again that all economic activities, including fisheries, are fully ruled by the dynamism of nature on this planet.

The livelihood of tuna fishermen in Kesenuma have been depending on the share of the fertile bounty of the ocean in Sanriku. I am sure that this FIP is a strong commitment of the fishermen in Kesenuma to conserve the marine ecosystem while continuing sustainable tuna fishery forever.

Shigeru Sugawara, Mayor of Kesenuma City

"We assure that this project based around Kesenuma Distant Water Fishery Cooperative which targets swordfish and blue shark caught by the tuna longline fishery will enhance those fish's sustainable use and gain trust of our city's core industry.

We have great expectations of this initiative to aim for MSC certification, alongside promoting our policy on SDGs (sustainable development goals).

Gakushi Ishimura, Associate Professor, Resource Economics and Policy Group, Faculty of Agriculture, Iwate University

"Ten years after the Great East Japan Earthquake, the challenge under the unpreceded COVID-19 pandemic is a significant step toward standing as a sustainable fishery."

Dr. Aiko Yamauchi, Senior Officer, Seafood Legacy Co., Ltd.

" The Kesenuma Distant Water Fisheries Cooperative's FIP will work on aims to meet the standard set by MSC, one of the internationally trusted certificate schemes. This FIP will challenge the identified current gaps together with stakeholders. Especially, we expect that improving the fishery of blue sharks whose stock needed to be sustainably used would be a highly important initiative to contribute to solve the sustainable challenges not only for this Kesenuma industry but also for all shark fisheries in the world.

About us:

Kesenuma Distant Water Fisheries Cooperative

Kesenuma Distant Water Fisheries Cooperative is an industry-specific fishery cooperative which was established based on the Fishery Cooperative Act. It's composed by tuna fishermen in Kesenuma City in Miyagi Prefecture where is known as a favorable fishing area and neighboring area. Although the cooperative had a severe damage because of the Great East Japan Earthquake, it's making a step forward for recovery supported by people in Japan

and the world. The belonging vessels are fishing tuna locally or internationally. It is our mission to protect the local traditional "tuna longline fishery".

The Resource Economics and Policy Laboratory at Iwate University

The Resource Economics and Policy lab aims to develop innovative scientific tools for natural resource management using advanced economic and policy analyses. Our team performs research on a wide array of topics, ranging from fisheries economics and marine resource conservation to sustainability education.

Seafood Legacy Co., Ltd.

Seafood Legacy Co., Ltd. is a social venture based in Tokyo which provides sustainable seafood consulting and platforming services to Japanese fishery, seafood businesses and government. Seafood is a symbol of the connections between marine ecosystems, marine economics, and regional communities, and our purpose is to ensure that it remains abundant for future generations. Seafood Legacy also strategically networks seafood businesses and NGOs to foster pre-competitive platform to solve mutual issues that various stakeholders face in Japan and the world.

For more information, please visit our website.

https://seafoodlegacy.com/en/project/kesennnumafip_en/

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