

(unofficial translation)

The Main Points of the Report by the ad-hoc Task Force on Fisheries Resource Management

Its purpose and background

- Under the auspices of the Fisheries Agency of Japan (FAJ), “the ad-hoc Task Force on Fisheries Resource Management (hereinafter referred as “Task Force”)” was established in order to rebuild fish stocks and to maintain or increase capture fisheries production in Japan, so that the productivity of Japan as a fishing nation be revitalized.
- Upon reviewing current fisheries resource management policies including total allowable catch (TAC) system and the framework for the Resource Management Guidelines and Plans, Task Force considered the applicability of individual quota (IQ) and individual transferable quota (ITQ) schemes to Japanese fisheries. It also provided specific proscriptions for the management of four fish stocks subjected, i.e., Chub Mackerel in the Pacific, Walleye Pollack in northern Japan Sea, Pacific Bluefin Tuna, and Ocellate Puffer.

Current fisheries resource management policies

1. General issues to be tackled

- While enhancing the effectiveness of both the official management measures such as TAC system and the fishermen’s autonomous management initiatives based on their Resource Management Plans, a synergistic effect need to be generated by ensuring appropriate combination of these official management measures and autonomous initiatives.
- In order to enhance the marine capture fisheries production in Japan, more effective resource management is necessary for fish stocks in Japanese waters, in particular, for those at historically low level and/or currently declining in their abundance.

2. Scientific assessment and evaluation of fisheries resources

- Scientific assessment and evaluation of the fisheries resources in Japanese waters (52 species and 84 stocks) have been annually conducted by Japan Fisheries Research Agency, in close cooperation with prefectural governments and universities, inviting external experts to the process.
- In addition to the fisheries production data, various data including those obtained by research vessels was collected in order to provide relevant information for resource management, which includes the allowable biological catch (ABC) and the abundance level/trend of each stock.
- A series of information exchange meetings have been held to fill the perception gap between scientists and fishermen concerning the current stock status.
- For further improvement of the accuracy of stock assessment and evaluation, data collection of fish species, including those of less information available, is to be strengthened. Also, the influence by oceanic environmental change to middle- and long-term fish stocks population dynamics is explored.

3. Enhancement of the official management measures

(1) TAC system

- As a principle, the upper limit of TAC set each year on each fish stock should conform to the ABC recommended. Even when TAC is to exceed ABC for some reasons, the difference should be narrowed as possible.
- At the same time, other input and/or technical control measures, which complement the output control by TAC system, is also necessary for stock recovery. When such stricter management measures are introduced, a mitigation of the negative impact for fishermen concerned should be considered.

(2) IQ and ITQ schemes

a) IQ scheme

- In light of its positive effects on resource management as well as profitability improvement, there is certain room for Japan to make further utilization of IQ scheme, on the premise that the quota allocated is non-transferable.
- As a next step, actual effects of IQ scheme in the real situation of Japanese fisheries need to be verified. An introduction of IQ scheme, on experimental basis, to the fisheries and fish species that seems to be feasible is therefore recommended.
- For this purpose, cooperative mechanism among fishermen, scientists, and fisheries managers concerned should be established in order to investigate the positive/negative effects of IQ scheme as well as the financial and administrative burdens incurred with it. Associated risks including the drop of income for fishermen who volunteered to the experiment also need to be taken care of.

b) ITQ scheme

- Task Force considers that the introduction of ITQ scheme to Japan is premature at present. Among many things, the reasons for this are: appropriateness of selling off the quota granted to seek financial profit without conducting fishing activities; increased financial cost for fishing operators including new entrants; resistance to stricter management measures by quota-holders because of the concessional value of quota; negative effects by quota integration against local fishing society and operational customs/orders which have been developed over long time.

4. Enhancement of the autonomous management initiatives

- Because three years have passed since the establishment of the framework for the Resource Management Guidelines and Plans, whether each individual Plan under the framework has brought positive outcomes such as resource recovery need to be assessed and evaluated.
- Such assessment and evaluation of individual Plan should be conducted by the fishermen who developed and implemented the Plan. Prefecture governments that developed the Guideline for their fishermen, on which each individual Plan based, should compile the outcomes of these Plans and report them to FAJ.
- In the process of assessment and evaluation in this regard, such authorities as national and/or prefectural governments may provide specific advice to the fishermen concerned when necessary. Such assistance contributes not only to the accomplishment of the assessment and evaluation but also to the refinement of the plan to be implemented.

- Subsequent to the assessment and evaluation of individual plans, evaluation of overall framework should also be conducted by FAJ, so that the framework in its entirety would be more effective and efficient.

Prescriptions on the resource management of specific fish stocks

1. Chub Mackerel in the Pacific

- The North Pacific Federation of large- and medium-scale purse seiners, which yields about 80% of the production of Chub Mackerel in the Pacific, have been implementing its autonomous management measures since 2003. Since their measures include the distribution of fishing quota among its members by month and/or vessel, it is assumed that the introduction of rather formal IQ-based management may contribute for them to conserve and effectively utilize the resource.
- In this context, Task Force recommends an introduction of IQ system for certain number of the Purse Seiners on trial basis in this autumn fishing season. The data collection associated with it should follow.
- This undertaking should be implemented as a test-case of IQ scheme in Japan, through which the actual effects and issues regarding IQ scheme should be evaluated. FAJ and other relevant bodies should prepare for the individual vessel management and the objective evaluation in this regard.

2. Walleye Pollack in northern Japan Sea

- To realize stock recovery, its TAC should conform to the ABC; otherwise, the TAC should be set as close as possible to the ABC. In addition, other input and/or technical control measures which contribute to the recovery should be implemented.
- In this case, because future TAC level would be considerably lower than current one, the way to allocate fishing quota need to be reconsidered to realize rational fishing practice, which balance the resource conservation and profitability performance. Reflecting the reality of fishing operations, the quota should be allocated to each optimal operational unit (plural vessels) rather than single vessel; the evaluation of this allocation method may contribute to future consideration of IQ-based management framework. It is noted that, however, for the small-scale coastal vessels whose number is too many to implement IQ scheme, region- or fishing type-based group quota is feasible.
- In implementing this initiative noted above, more active roles of central and prefectural governments are necessary in allocating and monitoring the fishing quota (e.g., by approving TAC implementation agreement among fishermen). Public research institutions should evaluate the actual effects and issues regarding this trial.
- At the same time, comprehensive measures toward the rationalized fisheries business administration in the coastal areas should be considered, which may include: a mitigation of the short-term economic distress of the fishermen; consideration of an optimal operational unit reflecting the reality of fishing operations; restructure of fishing sectors through occupational changes, buy-backs and so on.

3. Pacific Bluefin Tuna

- Responding to the scientific advice by the international scientific organization that the spawning stock biomass is at the historically lowest level and that significant catch

reduction of juvenile fish is necessary, national catch limit of juvenile fish (less than 30 kg) in 2015 or thereafter should be 4,007 tons.

- In order to observe this catch limit, six regional zones are established in which high frequency catch monitoring against coastal fisheries will be conducted. According to the amount of catch accumulated, FAJ will distribute cautionary notices or issue requests to refrain from fishing toward fishermen in a broad manner.
- FAJ also continues separate catch monitoring against large- and medium-scale purse seiners as well as their harvest management in Japan Sea during the spawning season.
- Additional measures to facilitate these undertakings noted above, including that for coastal set-net of non-species selectivity, should be considered.

4. Ocellate Puffer

- With the participation by all the bodies concerned, including those of fishermen, fisheries management authorities, and scientific institutions, a cross-sectorial forum should be established for the management Ocellate Puffer. It aims to promote resource management in accordance with the management guidelines and plans under unified policy to be developed, while encouraging preceding management initiatives by some fishermen groups.
- In addition, Task force emphasizes the need for further research on the fishing activities because immature fish said to account for approximately 70% of the total catch. In this sense, the restraint of the catch of immature fish and live-release of them at sea are advisable.
- With regard to effective stock enhancement by artificial seed fish, the seeds should be introduced in the spots where their survival rates are high. Such effort should go abreast of the control of fishing operations.

Expectations for the future resource management

- Upon receiving this report, FAJ should urgently consider concrete measures to realize the recommendation keeping in coordination with other governmental authorities and fishermen's organizations. When and where possible, FAJ and other bodies should promptly implement them.
- A set of management measures regarding four fish stocks noted above are not only important for their own sake but also useful in coping with the recovery of other fish stocks.
- Consideration of the future direction of Japanese fisheries management, including the assessment and evaluation of the framework of the Resource Management Guidelines and Plans, should continue keeping in mind the next revision of Japan's Basic Plan for Fisheries.
- Task Force wishes that these recommendations in the report would constitute an important step toward revitalization of Japanese fisheries.