



OPRT

NEWSLETTER INTERNATIONAL

CIEL BLUE Koji-machi (4F)
3-4-3 Koji-machi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-0083
Tel: 03-6256-9138; Fax:03-6256-9139
Website: <http://www.oprt.or.jp>

APR. 2023 No. 83

FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF TUNAS

Interview with Mr. Mitsuo Chiba, a trainer for new crew members who board distant-water tuna long line fishing vessels

A crew member who is, for the first time, boarding a distant-water tuna long line fishing vessel that leaves the City of Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture, Japan can receive practical training before boarding at the City's Fishery Training Center. Ex-officers with experience working onboard distant-water tuna long line fishing vessels teach basic techniques including how to use ropes and how a crew member should behave aboard. Mr. Mitsuo Chiba, one of the three trainers, worked for more than 30 years as a fishing master for distant-water tuna long line fishing vessels based in Kesennuma. Since retirement, he has been conducting pre-boarding training for 16 years. This interview features the content of the training and how he feels about young people who want to become a tuna fishing crew member.

Interviewer: What is your career background?

Mr. Chiba: After graduating junior high school, I started working onboard distant-water tuna long line fishing vessels based in Kesennuma. I became a fishing master when I was 28 and continued to work until I was 60 years old. I am currently the Director of the Kesennuma Branch Office of the Japan Fisheries Information Service Center and collect and provide information on fish landed at the Port of Kesennuma. While this is my main job, I also participate in the pre-boarding training sessions for new crew members.

Interviewer: How did you come to conduct pre-boarding training?

Mr. Chiba: The president of the fishing company which owned the last fishing vessel I boarded in my career was also the president of the Northern Miyagi Prefecture Vessel Owners Association. The Association is in charge of the insurance, labor conditions and safety of crew onboard tuna long line fishing vessels in the Kesennuma

area. When I was approaching 60 years old, I told him that I was thinking about retirement. He asked me to train those who want to become crew members for fishing vessels. It was about 20 years ago. He was probably thinking that if distant-water tuna long line fishing vessels were to survive, it would be necessary to recruit and train young people. I accommodated his request as I wanted to give back to the fishing industry.

Interviewer: What does the training program involve?

Mr. Chiba: The main training is how to use ropes and handle fishing gears. Skill is required to fix gears when branch lines are tangled or worn out. I stress that a fishing vessel rolls and pitches at sea and the temperature and humidity vary, so you may not be able to do at sea what you can do at the training center. In addition, I teach crew members how they should behave aboard, basic rules for daily life, and how to work with foreign crew members. Since the duration of the training is only five days, I try to help them understand why they need to learn this, while telling them my experience. In the distant-water tuna long line fishery, everybody is given an opportunity to work regardless of their age and educational background, but you must have a strong will to be successful. I am sometimes strict with my students to test their will. Once, I said, "You can leave now if you do not want to become a crew member after hearing my explanation of the reality."

Interviewer: I hear that living and working in the same place is mentally difficult.

Mr. Chiba: That is why I believe that follow-up after departure is important. When they leave port, I say, "You can contact me whenever you want. I cannot come to where you are, but I can give you advice." When they cannot consult with vessel officers and other crew

members, they contact me. There are sometimes vessel officers that you cannot get along well with. When we were young, there were many more fishing vessels and we were able to change vessels relatively easily after returning to the port if we did not like the officers. This is not necessarily the case now.

Interviewer: Do you see your ex-students?

Mr. Chiba: I try to see them as much as possible if they contact me after returning to port. If he is the one who consulted with me about his worries during the voyage, I ask “What happened afterwards?” I can easily understand whether he managed to handle things by looking at his face. Some of them present me with some portion of tuna, saying “I caught this!,” which is the happiest moment for me. I take them to a cafe to hear the situation of the vessel and their problems. Everybody has some worries and is struggling with something.

Interviewer: What type of person is suited to distant-water tuna long line fishing?

Mr. Chiba: The best person would be a graduate of a fishery high school with a good level of knowledge who has a high motivation to become a crew member. It leaves an impression on students at the fishery high school if a teacher with distant-water fishery experience says, “Why don’t you go abroad once, while you are young?” However, the number of students at fishery high schools has been decreasing and some of the schools were integrated into a regular high school as one of the special curriculums, which results in their specialization gradually fading away. Also, the number of teachers with actual fishery experience has been decreasing and many of the teachers can only teach how wonderful it is to work onboard a vessel through textbooks. On the other hand, many people lost their jobs due to COVID-19, some of whom understood the reality and tried to become a crew member with a strong will to earn money. The crew job does not allow you to earn money without hardship, but you can earn as much money as the hardship you endure. In this regard, even if you have none of the basic knowledge people learn at a fishery high school, you can become a crew member if you have already learnt how a man should live. Also, those who have not learnt basic courtesy and rules of etiquette tend to work for only a shorter time. No matter how society changes, you need to keep good company with the people around you.

Interviewer: How would it be possible to increase the number of young people who want to work for the distant-water tuna long line fishery?

Mr. Chiba: While each company has its specific management policy, I believe that now is the time to spend more money on employees. Also, it is important to take care of crew members after the vessel leaves port through frequent communication, as well as to hear from them after the vessel returns to port. You should not cut corners on these follow-up actions. It is surely difficult for young people to work onboard a fishing vessel with elderly experts. They may not have topics of common interest. In this regard, a vessel that already has a young person can provide a good atmosphere for young newcomers to learn the work. Recently, more vessels have at least one young person. This new environment should be utilized to foster young crew members.

Interviewer: How do you see the future for crew on distant-water tuna long line fishing vessels and what are the problems?

Mr. Chiba: There is a serious shortage of engineers. It takes three years for a deckhand to become a qualified one, while it takes at least five years for engineers. There should be an educational course specialized in fostering engineers. Otherwise, some vessels will not be operational in the near future due to the lack of engineers. The good news is that some people who retired from engine companies tell me that they can teach engineer cadets prior to departure. Retired crew members and those who retired from fishing-related companies also tell me the same thing. In the City of Kesenuma, it seems to me that more and more retired people are participating in activities to foster young crew members. I very much appreciate them. They want to give back to the fishing industry and this goodwill should be used for young people. I am getting old and having more difficulty in doing the same thing, but still want to help as much as I can.

Negotiation for a new UN agreement on biodiversity is completed

The negotiation for a new United Nations agreement on biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) was completed on March 4 this year. This UN agreement

has four main pillars for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in the high seas: area-based management tools including marine protected areas (MPAs); proper use of marine genetic resources; environmental impact assessment; and capacity building for developing countries.

The Agreement was achieved through four preparatory meetings and six intergovernmental meetings held since 2015. Initially, developed countries, except for EU member countries, were skeptical about the need to start the negotiation because conservation of biodiversity in the high seas is supposed to be implemented by regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) and few genetic resources exist in the high seas in reality. However, the EU strongly believed that not only fisheries but also other economic activities such as marine transportation, setting of cables at the sea bottom, and deep-sea mining could affect biodiversity in the high seas and a more comprehensive approach should be introduced. Developing countries were concerned that developed countries would monopolize the benefits from genetic resources in the high seas. As a result, the negotiation was started. It seems that the position of the EU was strongly affected by the view of environmental NGOs which considered that: (i) existing RFMOs did not necessarily ensure the sustainable use of fishery resources and protection of marine ecosystems, and establishment of MPAs should be promoted for these purposes; and (ii) since RFMOs are very slow in establishing MPAs, a global instrument should be established to order RFMOs to establish MPAs.

This relationship between the Agreement and RFMOs over MPAs was not agreed until the last moment of the negotiation. The final provisions are:

- (1) Parties shall submit proposals to the Secretariat if they want to establish area-based management tools including MPAs. The proposals shall be published. In formulating proposals, the proponents shall collaborate and consult, as appropriate, with relevant stakeholders such as international organizations including RFMOs; concerned countries, particularly coastal countries adjacent to the high seas area; and civil society. These stakeholders are invited to submit comments, which shall be published.
- (2) The proposals are reviewed by the Scientific and Technical Body of the Agreement. The results of the

review shall be published and sent back to the proponents. The proponents shall consider the comments and results of the review and revise the proposals accordingly.

(3) The Conference of the Parties, on the basis of the final proposal, shall take decisions on the establishment of area-based management tools, including marine protected areas. It may, where proposed measures are within the competences of RFMOs, make recommendations to the RFMOs to promote the adoption of relevant measures. In taking such decisions, the Conference of the Parties shall respect the competences of and, not undermine, RFMOs.

(4) The decisions shall be taken by consensus. If no consensus is reached, the Conference of the Parties shall decide, by a two-thirds majority of the representatives present and voting that every effort to reach agreement by consensus has been exhausted. If this decision is made, decisions shall be taken by a three-quarter majority of the representatives present and voting. Such decisions shall enter into force 120 days after the Conference.

As seen above, the competence of RFMOs is secured under the Agreement. However, several questions arise such as: (i) to what extent will the proponents reflect the comments of the RFMOs on the revised proposal?; and (ii) it says that in taking such decisions, the Conference of the Parties shall respect the competences of and, not undermine, RFMOs, but what do “respect the competence” and “not undermine the competence” mean? It may be necessary to look at the actual implementation of the Agreement to get the answers to these points.

When recommendations on the adoption of relevant measures are made to RFMOs, Article 20 of the Agreement says that Parties shall promote the adoption of measures within RFMOs of which they are members, to support the implementation of the recommendations. Thus, in the case that the majority of the members of an RFMO are Parties to the Agreement, it will be difficult for the RFMO to ignore the recommendations. RFMOs should take seriously the criticisms against them, which were expressed during the negotiation, and are urged to further promote the sustainable use of fishery resources and protection of marine ecosystems.

Results of ICCAT Panel 1 Intersessional Meeting

Panel 1 Intersessional Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) was held in Lisbon from March 27 to 31 in a hybrid manner. Panel 1 is the sub-committee of ICCAT that deals with conservation and management of tropical tunas. Since the adoption of the conservation and management measures for tropical tunas in 2019, ICCAT has been discussing amendments to the measures, particularly the level of the total allowable catch (TAC) of bigeye and the catch limits of individual Members with no success, which resulted in the roll-over of the existing measures. To break the impasse, ICCAT decided to hold two intersessional meetings of Panel 1 this year and this meeting was the first one.

With respect to the TAC (currently 62,000 t), the latest stock assessment in 2021 states that the stock is still overfished, but it is no longer subject to overfishing. This means that the stock is expected to increase, and a certain level of TAC increase could be possible without hampering the stock's recovery. The assessment stated, however, that due to a large degree of uncertainty, caution is required in setting the TAC. The assessment contained a Kobe 2 Strategic Matrix (K2SM) which shows probabilities of the stock being in the safety zone in year XX at different TAC levels, saying that the probabilities should be interpreted with caution and ICCAT should consider adopting a TAC that would shift the stock status towards the safety zone with a high probability. Since a specific TAC level in line with these recommendations was not provided, it is up to Panel 1 to decide how much caution should be given and what the high probability is. At last year's annual meeting, Members were split over different levels of the TAC, i.e., 62,500 t (the probability of the stock being in the safety zone in 2034 is 97%), 70,000t (82%), 75,000 t (64%) and 77,500 t (54%). Some Members said that the current measures use 50% for the probability and 54% is enough. Other Members said that ICCAT has been moving towards 60% for many stocks and a higher percentage than 60% should be used to address the uncertainties. At this meeting, the views were converging into a range of 70,000 to 75,000, particularly 72,500 (73%) or 73,000 (about 71%) as a compromise, but no agreement was reached. It was also recognized that the TAC should be increased to accommodate the interests of developing

Members to develop their own fisheries.

Also, some Members stated that if the TAC exceeds 70,000 t, the catch of juvenile bigeye is likely to increase, causing negative impacts on the bigeye stock. To mitigate such impacts, some Members stressed the need to introduce additional measures. A proposal was submitted to establish an interim harvest control rule by which ICCAT shall automatically reduce the TAC if the probability of the stock being in the safety zone in 2034 in the next stock assessment (in 2024) is below 70%. While there was a general agreement to establish this type of safeguard measure, some Members argued that 70% is too high compared to the 50% used in the current measures and advocated that 60% is enough to take into account uncertainties.

Also, some Members indicated that the current FAD (fish aggregating device) closure period (72 days during which the use of FADs is prohibited) should be extended and the number of FADs used by one purse seiner should be reduced from 300 to 250. Purse seine Members spoke against these points as the FAD closure is causing socioeconomic difficulties in local communities and there is no scientific basis for the further reduction of the FAD number.

As to the catch limits of bigeye, one group of Members said that it is unfair that five developed Members hold more than half of the total catch limit and that the catch limits of these Members should be greatly reduced and redistributed among developing Members. Another group said that the transfer of catch limits from developed Members to developing Members should be made gradually and future unutilized catch limits should be redistributed among Members that need higher catch limits. Another group said that the catch limits of Members whose actual catches were far less than the catch limits in the last several years should be reduced and redistributed. Another group said that developed coastal Members whose catches are small should be treated differently from those five developed Members. As a result, there was no convergence of views.

The next Panel 1 Intersessional Meeting will be held in Madrid from June 20 to 22 in a hybrid manner.