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The Alarming Reality for “Food Procurement” at the Tokyo Olympics

東京五輪に向けて問われる「食料調達」の深刻な現実



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Creating a “sustainable society” by improving the marine environment



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David Rockefeller, the third head of the world famous billionaire family, passed away in March 2017. On the one hand, the Rockefeller family brought in the “Age of Oil” by starting up Standard Oil, but on the other hand this oil brought about an environmental crisis to the earth.

With the passing of his father, David Rockefeller Jr. was chosen as the fourth head of the Rockefeller clan, which is made up of over 300 members. He has been active in marine environment protection for many years.

David has been extremely busy with sorting out the enormous inheritance, yet he still fulfilled the annual Japan travel ritual along with his wife and I when he visited Japan at the end of October this year. We have so many memories of this ritual, but what happened during this trip became a critical turning point in changing the tide of marine environmental problems. It happened in 2012.

While we were paying a visit to Naritasan Temple, David noticed engravings of many fish on the lanterns and railings.

He said, “Why don’t Japanese people take care of the seafood resources when they love fish so much?”

And out of his trousers pocket, he retrieved his wallet where he kept a small pocket guide.

“Tuna will soon become one of the endangered species. We have a convenient guide like this in the US.”

Then he showed me the pocket guide called “Seafood Watch.” This was a decisive moment for me; the

moment that I learned what I needed to know. “Right now, there are fish we can eat and fish that will become extinct if we keep eating them the way we do now.” Two years later, Pacific bluefin tuna became an endangered species as David prophesized.



On November 1st, 2017, Sailors for the Sea Japan, a marine environment protection organization for which David Rockefeller Jr. acts as an honorary chairman, held the “Blue Seafood Guide Charity Reception.” Over 300 guests attended this reception, including distinguished guests such as Akie Abe, the first lady, Yuriko Koike, the governor of Tokyo, Viorel Isticioaia-Budura, the EU ambassador to Japan, and his wife, Joao Aguiar Machado, the head of the EU Maritime Department of Fisheries, and his wife, along with seven Diet members.

The Blue Seafood Guide, which is based on the sustainable seafood rating program, “Seafood Watch,” by the US Monterey Bay Aquarium, made its start in 2013. This was one year after the lightning bolt moment I had at Naritasan Temple.

The original Seafood Watch classifies the sustainability level of seafood in the three colors of a traffic light with “best choice,” “good alternative,” and “avoid.” In comparison, the Blue Seafood Guide strives to educate the Japanese consumers positively, and it only lists seafood that has a reasonably abundant stock based on the data published by the Fisheries Agency. The next challenge is to establish a strong third-party organization that specializes in the scientific inspection of seafood stocks.

From around the time when the Blue Seafood Guide was established, there has been a rush of interest in Japan from abroad. Lead by the Rockefeller couple, overseas foundations, such as the Packard Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, as well as individual philanthropists, and NGOs like the Nature Conservancy and Environmental Defense Fund and Ocean Outcomes, have begun their work in Japan.

This is how much the world expects Japan to change. From past experiences, many Japanese people still associate marine environment protection with being blamed by the world for whale and dolphin problems, but this is not the case. The Japanese are now expected to steer towards seafood sustainability and away from ephemeral fishing that is depleting the resources.

A crucial time before the Tokyo Olympics

Japan's actions are being watched now, particularly with the need to procure sustainable food for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. The Tokyo Olympics/Paralympics Organizing Committee has announced the standardized procurement policy. But because the seafood procurement policy does not fulfill the "standard of sustainable procurement" of the UN FAO and it is not continuing the legacy that was established at both the London and Rio Olympics, criticism is pouring in internationally and domestically.

Internationally certified seafood, such as by the MSC or ASC, has proven sustainability to abide by the FAO guidelines. In Japan, the only seafoods certified at this time are the Hokkaido scallop, Miyagi oyster, Kyoto red flounder, and Miyagi single-pole fished skipjack and albacore tuna. Even if a fishery wants to apply for the certification, they become dismayed because the bar is set so high with a price tag in the tens of millions of yen together with a certification process that takes over two years.

Governor Koike gave a speech at the reception mentioned earlier saying, "The Tokyo Olympics must be sustainable." Now that we have less than 1,000 days, all of Japan should give multidimensional support to raise the level of domestic seafood sustainability and the proof of its sustainability.

The public can make a difference too. The consumers can support the movement through voting with action by buying sustainable seafood,

The world is now supporting Japan in this crucial time to move towards the sustainable use of marine resources. The Rockefeller couple promised to come back to Japan next year. And as they left Japan, President Trump came.

By Minako Iue

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