

Japan's fisheries and the whales - not

by Daniel Pauly

Visiting the Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo is a unique experience, but I did it twice: during the Second Asian Fisheries Forum, in April 1989, and on October 16 of this year, prior to the International Marine Environment Symposium organized by Greenpeace Japan, and held at the Tokyo headquarters of United Nations University (UNU).

This long-planned conference came at the right time for Greenpeace, whose recent anti-whaling actions, intended to prove that the crew of Japanese whaling vessels were illegally mailing whale meat to friends at home, had featured breaking into the warehouse of a courier firm.¹ What were they thinking?

After the opening, I spoke about global fisheries going the way of the dodo unless they accept conservation measures, then went back to my seat, hoping to work on a terrible attack of jet lag. But I could not do the dastardly deed: I was kept awake by neat presentations by Ellen Pikitch and Callum Roberts, both of which developed



In Tsukiji market, October 16, 2008. Photo by Callum Roberts.

further the theme that we shouldn't assist the fishing industry in committing suicide. But it was the irrepressible Mr. Masayuki Komatsu, speaking on the "Future of Japanese marine industry", who really alerted me.

Mr. Komatsu, who must be presented here, is now at Japan's National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies; he recently retired from Japan's Fisheries Agency, where, over time, he developed a line of imaginative, if completely absurd, arguments in support of Japan's "scientific" whaling,

culminating in the claim that whales are responsible for the worldwide decline of fisheries resources (see Komatsu and Misaki 2003). As lies go, this is a humongous one, but this did not prevent it from sabotaging several FAO-sponsored conferences (e.g., that on Responsible Fisheries and Marine Ecosystems, held in 2001 in Reykjavik, which Mr. Komatsu single-handedly turned into a train wreck), and successive meetings of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), which this argument and the bribing of a few delegations (Stringer 2006) has split right down the middle (see Pauly 2008, and Swartz and Pauly 2008).

I had an inkling of what Mr. Komatsu was going to talk about because he had visited the Fisheries Centre a few weeks before the conference, and, during a very positive discussion, mentioned that he was a member of a "Regulatory Reform Council", formed by the Office of the Cabinet of the Government of Japan to find solutions (including in foreign countries if need be) to the deep trouble the

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coastal fisheries of Japan find themselves in. Still, I was not prepared for the vehemence with which he presented his case that the resources exploited by Japan's coastal fisheries are in steep decline, and that these subsidy-bloated fisheries have become hotbeds of seemingly intractable conflicts. In fact, this was a presentation the like of which I have never seen, in any country. But the whales... No, they were not mentioned! Mr. Komatsu correctly assigned the blame where it belongs, to a complacent government that has relied on both the vaulted self-management of Japan coastal fisheries (Ruddle 1987) and on subsidies to solve a problem that can be solved only with intelligent governance, i.e., with connecting fishing rights

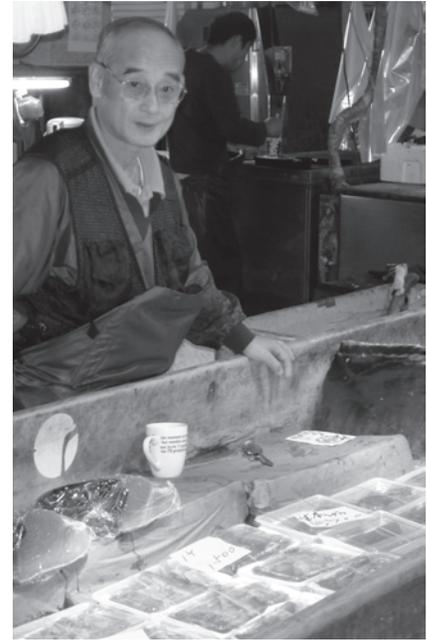
with duties, and providing incentives to limit fishing effort.

The day's subsequent speakers further reinforced the point Mr. Komatsu had made. Thus, Mr. Yasuyuki Yamamoto, of the Aeon Topvalu supermarket chain, noted that his firm is forced to purchase Alaskan fish to ensure product quality, and Mr. Atsushi Sasaki, a rather garrulous fisherman, noted that he is not surprised the young Japanese prefer big macs, given the antibiotic-ridden farmed fish on the markets.

Overall, the tone of the conference was one of real worry (hence the absence of whales), perhaps bordering on panic: how is Japan, under these conditions, going to maintain its enormous consumption of seafood?

Which brings us back to Tsukiji's market, featuring both locally-caught and imported seafood. Japan presently imports over 50% of its seafood (lest we forget: this is less than the EU countries, which import about 70-80%), and Tsukiji's market is one of the gates through which this enormous number of fish and invertebrate bodies that this entails must pass.

During this visit on the day prior to the conference, I had the



In Tsukiji market, October 16, 2008. Photo by Callum Roberts.

vague feeling that the Tsukiji market looked less neat, and was in fact dingier than I remembered, and that the fish on display (e.g., groupers and rockfish, and even sardines) were smaller than before. As it then turned out, Ellen Pikitch and Callum Roberts, who had also visited earlier, had the same impression. But we knew that one shouldn't give too much credence to subjective impression.

And then I met Dr. Tatiana Gadda, who did her PhD at UNU, analyzing a long time series (1953-2003) of sale records from the Tsukiji market. She had asked me in 2002 where she

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could get trophic level estimates and I had responded (“in FishBase,” obviously). From these, and sale records for nearly 400 species, she computed decadal mean trophic level of the seafood sold at Tsukiji market, and lo and behold, her results are unequivocal: the mean trophic level of this seafood is going down, at about the same rate estimated by various authors for large marine ecosystems.

There is more to this story, and it will be told elsewhere. Suffice here to say that one of the richest countries on earth, home to a people of seafood connoisseurs, is not capable of maintaining its catches and imports of high trophic level fish,

neither from its own EEZ, nor from the High Sea or the EEZ of other countries. There is a lesson in this, and not only for Japan.

Footnote

¹ See the New York Times article of Sunday, Nov 23, 2008 (www.nytimes.com/2008/11/23/world/asia/23whale.html?_r=1&ei=5070)

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... the mean trophic level of this seafood is going down



Power in diversity: Bringing people together and putting ideas out

by Megan Bailey and Rashid Sumaila

Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, was the setting for an international, multi-stakeholder workshop to address economic security and sustainable tuna fisheries in the Coral Triangle. The workshop was organized and funded primarily by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) group and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and hosted by the Indonesian government. The APEC workshop brought together about 80 individuals from nine countries, including the two of us from the Fisheries Centre. The participants included fisheries government officials, international diplomats, academics, conservation groups, aide organizations, and industry representatives all with a common interest: ensuring the

sustainability of tuna resources in the region.

The Coral Triangle (CT), a region bounded by the countries of Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and the Solomon Islands, has gained recent attention from conservationists and academics due to its rich coral reef and reef fish biodiversity. The focus of the APEC workshop was not on corals at all, but rather on the fate of the region's tuna fisheries. The Western and Central Pacific Ocean is home to many commercially important tuna species, including albacore, skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye tuna. The CT is believed to house important spawning and nursery areas for these species, and also for the Southern Bluefin Tuna,

which migrates into the Triangle from the Indian Ocean. Some of these tuna resources are threatened due to overfishing, which can be linked to the lack of sustainable financing of management measures in CT countries.

The first day included keynote presentations, one of which was given by Rashid Sumaila, covering: the legal challenges omnipresent in international fisheries management; tuna trade issues; biological circumstances of certain gear types; alternative valuation possibilities; current status and challenges of tuna fisheries in Indonesia; successful management measures in Papua New Guinea; and the possible

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