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New FIP to Improve Giant Octopus Fishery in Northern Japan

Collaborative approach to fishery improvement continues to produce results

April 26, 2019 – After two years of conversation, site visits and scientific work, Japan’s third fishery improvement project (FIP) is now officially underway. The project – a joint initiative between Ocean Outcomes, Seafood Legacy Co., Ltd., fishermen from Tomamae fishery coop of Kita-Rumoi Fisheries Cooperative and the Wakkanai Fisheries Research Institute – will work to revitalize the Tomamae North Pacific Giant Octopus fishery in Hokkaido by transitioning the fishery and its management to science-based best practices.

Home to key octopus fishing grounds which produce a significant portion of Japanese octopus, Tomamae town in Hokkaido is renowned for its fisheries, especially its catches of giant octopus (*Enteroctopus dofleini*). In Tomamae, the fishing industry employs an estimated 10% of the population of 3,200, which includes the octopus fishermen of the Kita-Rumoi Fisheries Cooperative.

However, as with the trends for Japan as a whole, the fishing industry in Tomamae is in decline, experiencing a reduction in catches, an aging of the workforce, and a lack of new interest in the industry.

“Ensuring well managed and sustainable fisheries through fishery improvement projects such as this contributes directly to the Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations and to the well-being of local fishing communities in Hokkaido,” said Shunji Murakami who is leading the project for Seafood Legacy.

“The giant octopus fishery is a major fishery, so it’s viability is key to economic development of the region,” added Mr. Hoshino of the Wakkanai Fisheries Research Institute. “We’re enthusiastic to support the technical and analytical science behind this project as we collectively work towards revitalizing the region’s fisheries.”

To address these issues, the Barrel Flowing Fishery Group at Tomamae fishery coop, which is a branch of Kita-Rumoi Fisheries Cooperative, and scientists from the Wakkanai Fisheries Research Institute are working with Ocean Outcomes and Seafood Legacy to conduct stock assessments and establish a precautionary harvest strategy.

This work, implemented through a four-year FIP workplan will help ensure octopus populations remain abundant, while generating domestic and international interest and investment in the region’s unique fisheries and seafood industry.

“My passion for preserving local fishing communities and coastal fisheries inspired me to join the FIP,” said Koichi Ogasawara, the President of Tomamae branch of Kita-Rumoi Fisheries Cooperative. “I can envision similar projects as solutions to the problems facing Japanese fisheries across the Japanese Sea.”

“Proactive and local stakeholders and fishermen have really driven FIP development,” added Dr. Jocelyn Drugan of Ocean Outcomes who is overseeing the technical aspects of the FIP. “This is further evidence that collaborative approaches are key to moving Japanese fisheries towards sustainability.”

The Tomamae Giant Pacific Octopus FIP is the third project of its kind in Japan. The other two FIPs, both joint projects of Seafood Legacy and Ocean Outcomes, recently received an “A - Advanced Progress” rating for making publicly-verifiable improvements to fishing practices on the water.

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[Ocean Outcomes \(O2\)](#) is an international organization which works with local communities, fisheries, and the seafood industry to improve the environmental, social, and economic sustainability of fisheries and aquaculture operations.

[Seafood Legacy](#) is a Tokyo-based social venture established in 2015 specializing in sustainable seafood and fisheries. Seafood Legacy provides sustainable seafood consulting services to marine-related businesses, producers and NGOs to strengthen the connections of marine ecosystems, economies and local communities. Seafood Legacy designs regional solutions which meet international standards and are tailored to the unique Japanese environment via a non-competitive platform designed to solve mutual issues facing various stakeholders.