

Outline of the Marine Biodiversity Conservation Strategy in Japan

1. Background

Ocean is an essential component to sustain lives on the Earth. Humans survive on various blessings from diverse organisms and ecosystems in the ocean.

In recent years, there is a strong indication that marine biodiversity has been deteriorating at both domestic and international levels, and the Japanese people also take more interests in the conservation of marine biodiversity.

This Conservation Strategy was formulated by the Ministry of the Environment in Japan on the basis of the “National Biodiversity Strategy (approved by the Cabinet in March 2010)” under the “Basic Act on Biodiversity (enacted in May 2008).” It is in line with international targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity, and with the “Basic Act on Ocean Policy (enacted in April 2007)” and the “Basic Plan on Ocean Policy (approved by the Cabinet in March 2008)” in Japan.

2. Objectives

This Conservation Strategy aims to conserve the biodiversity which supports the sound structure and function of marine ecosystems, and to utilize ecological services of the ocean, or the blessings from the ocean, in a sustainable manner.

The Strategy, therefore, mainly addresses areas within the exclusive economic zone of Japan, or areas under its jurisdiction, and provides basic perspectives and direction of measures for conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity.

3. Biodiversity in the ocean and its ecosystem services

Complex topography with drastically changing depths, various ocean currents such as the Kuroshio Current and the Oyashio Current, and the lengthy Japanese Archipelago extending from south to north create rich variety of environments in waters around Japan to allow diverse marine organisms to live.

Biodiversity could be referred to as “characteristics” and “interrelations” of life created through the long history of evolution. Biodiversity provides human beings with the foundation for their survival, and human beings benefit from various supports, or ecological services, from ecosystems with interactions among various organisms.

In this way, human beings depend on various blessings from marine organisms and ecosystems, but there is a concern over deterioration of marine biodiversity by their activities in recent years.

4. Basic perspectives

(1) Recognition of the importance of marine biodiversity

It is important to recognize marine biodiversity and its various blessings. Long-term and continuous utilization of the ecosystems services requires maintenance of sound ecosystems. In addition, for continuous promotion of their conservation and sustainable utilization, it is essential to properly assess the importance of marine biodiversity for our economic activities and social life, to accept its conservation as worthwhile.

(2) Integrated management of the sea

- **Importance of its linkage with the land in coastal areas:** It is necessary to manage a coastal area considering the linkage between the land and the sea. Approaches to perceive a whole watershed as an integral part are among such management.
- **Importance of extensive perspectives on the open ocean:** Considering the continuity of the ocean and the extensive migration of marine organisms, international cooperation, such as cooperation with neighboring countries, is important for the open ocean.

(3) Measures appropriate for the characteristics of marine areas around Japan

Characteristics of ecosystems and the major influencing factors differ between coastal water and the open ocean. Marine environment also varies significantly with latitude, ocean current and bottom topography. It is important to implement measures for their conservation and sustainable utilization, taking characteristics of individual marine areas into consideration.

(4) Effective measures that utilize local knowledge and technology

It is important to respect activities of local communities for conservation and management on the basis of their long history and traditional wisdom. Participation of various local actors and facilitation of coordination among them are also important.

(5) Summary of the concept of Marine Protected Areas

- **Marine Protected Areas:** Marine areas designated and managed by law or other effective means, in consideration of use modalities, aimed at the conservation of marine biodiversity supporting the sound structure and function of marine ecosystems and ensuring the sustainable use of marine ecosystem services.
- **Current status of Marine Protected Areas in Japan and their challenges:** In Japan, areas that would fall under Marine Protected Areas have been designated in various forms such as National Parks. From now on, it is necessary to consider a concept of efficient Marine Protected Areas through their improvement by application of the existing systems and effective combinations of these. Continuous review for appropriate measures or systems is also required, considering accumulation of knowledge and changes of the social situation.

5. Development of measures

(1) Improvement of baseline information

Methods and systems for the effective and efficient collection and utilization of information at the national level will be considered for systematic accumulation of information and knowledge regarding marine biodiversity. Marine areas of particular importance for conserving biodiversity will be identified on the basis of scientific knowledge.

(2) Identification of factors influencing marine biodiversity and implementation of measures to reduce them

To promote conservation of marine biodiversity and its sustainable use appropriately, causes of the problems and those responsible for actions to reduce their impacts will be identified. Measures will be conducted with methods and procedures suitable to solve these problems, under cooperation among relevant parties.

(3) Implementation of measures appropriate for characteristics of individual marine areas

Measures for conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity will be implemented in accordance with characteristics of individual marine area, such as differences in the ecosystems and major influencing factors between coastal water and the open ocean.

(4) Improvement of Marine Protected Areas and enhancement of their networking

Designation Marine Protected Areas will be promoted appropriately using the existing systems such as National Parks, and management of Marine Protected Areas will be improved and enhanced. For conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, a concept of effective networking of Marine Protected Areas will be considered, and if required, a new system will be considered as well.

(5) Facilitation of public acceptance and involvement of various actors

Scientific information and knowledge regarding the current status of marine biodiversity, various values associated with it, and the necessity for its conservation will be distributed for publicity among the public. To establish a network of Marine Protected Areas, cooperation and coordination among various relevant actors will be enhanced, and awareness of conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in social activities will be raised.