

Fishing Harbours and Fish Markets of Japan - A treat to the eyes

Photo Essay by Y S Yadava

A visit to fishing harbours and fish markets in Japan is an exciting experience. Cleanliness and orderliness is amazing and awesome. Facilities are simple but highly mechanized and modern. No compromises are made in the hygienic handling of fish and fish products until they reach the consumers. They set international benchmarks in sanitation and hygiene.

This photo feature, second in the series of articles on Japanese post-harvest infrastructure, provides glimpses into the fishing harbours and fish markets in Hokkaido province of Japan. The first article featured the Metropolitan Central Wholesale Market of Tokyo at Tsukiji (*Bay of Bengal News, Vol IV, No 9, September 2006, pp 21-24*).

The journey to various places of fisheries importance in Hokkaido province was undertaken in September 2007 as a part of the Training Project for Promotion of Community-based Fishery Resource Management by Coastal small-scale Fishers. The International Cooperative Fisheries Organization of the International Cooperative Alliance is implementing the project. BOBP-IGO is one of the partners.

The province of Hokkaido, an important fishing area of Japan, is surrounded by three waters; the Pacific Ocean, the Sea of Japan, and the Okhotsk Sea. It has a 3 045 km coastline which makes up 9 percent of Japan's coastline. There are very productive fishing grounds east of Hokkaido, where a branch of the current from the northward-flowing Kuroshio warm current and the southward-flowing Oyashio cold currents meet. There are also wide continental shelves and seamounts.

Hokkaido houses 14 per cent of Japan's fishers and accounts for a full quarter of the country's

*Fishing port of Notsuke FCA, which is important for the landings of chum salmon *Oncorhynchus keta* or *Shirozake* in Japanese (1-4).*

HACCP is widely integrated into all the processes – from harvesting to post-harvesting activities (5).

Hakodate is one of Japan's major fishing ports. A wide variety of fishes are traded in the auction hall of the fishing port (6-7).



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total fish catch. The fisheries sector in Hokkaido is a major economic sector of the prefecture, constituting about 15 per cent of the total primary industries production of Hokkaido. In 2005, the total fisheries production including aquaculture from Hokkaido was 1.4 million tonnes, which constituted 24.8 percent of Japan's total national production (5.67 million tonnes). The main fisheries are scallop, salmon, Alaskan Pollack, Atka mackerel and kelp. Hokkaido accounts for almost the entire national production of these species.

The coastline of Hokkaido province is dotted with fishing harbours and fish landing centres. These infrastructure facilities are mostly managed by the Fisheries Cooperative Associations (FCAs) and are highly organized. They offer excellent landing and berthing jetties, auction halls, ice for preservation of fish and other forward and backward linkages for harvest and post-harvest activities.

The FCAs carry out several professional, business and community functions. They take active part in welfare programmes for fishers, such as financial service and health management. They also help out with communications and disaster and crime prevention. FCAs often serve as core centers for the regions.

Japanese are connoisseurs of fish and fish markets play an important role in meeting this dietary requirement. Fish markets abound with varieties of fin and shell fish species and products procured from different parts of Japan and from abroad. They run a riot of colours, tempting the customers. I visited two markets in Hokkaido province – the fish market in Hakodate city and the 'Nijo Ichiba' (South 2nd Street Market) market in Sapporo city.

The *Nijo Ichiba* is more than 100 years old and was once also ravaged by fire. Today, the retail shops in *Nijo Ichiba* have established a cooperative and the fish market for general consumers and tourists. Many tourists come to visit the market since they can buy almost all kinds of fish and fishery products produced in Hokkaido. *Nijo Ichiba* attracts people not only from within the country but also from neighbouring countries such as Taiwan, Korea, Russia and China, etc.

Women in fishing communities play multiple roles.

They often take part in fishing, sort the fish by species and size after landing and prepare the fish for shipping by loading ice in the fish box (1-3).

Fishery products account for 40 percent of the animal protein intake (20 percent of the total protein intake) of Japanese people (4-6).



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