

Environmental Preservation Efforts in the Seto Inland Sea

Taisuke Shibagaki

Since ancient times, the Seto Inland Sea has been blessed with a magnificent natural environment. It has been not only a place of great scenic beauty but a treasure trove of resources for the fishing industry. As industries and people have congregated in the area around the Seto Inland Sea, however, water pollution increased rapidly beginning in the mid-1960s, making it necessary to promote strict water quality preservation measures. In 1973, Interim Law for Conservation of the Environment of the Seto Inland Sea was enacted, and in 1978 this was made permanent as Law Concerning Special Measures for Conservation of the Environment of the Seto Inland Sea (Seto Inland Sea Law). In this way, comprehensive policies to preserve water quality have been promoted.

Under the Seto Inland Sea Law, in order to promote policies to preserve the environment of the Seto Inland Sea in a comprehensively planned manner and from a long-term perspective, the Plan to Serve as the Basic Plan for Conservation of the Environment of the Seto Inland Sea (Basic Plan) is being enacted. In December 2000, the Ministry of the Environment conducted a complete revision of the Basic Plan for the first time in 22 years to restore lost environments and deal with other new issues that have arisen in recent years. The new Basic Plan will strive to upgrade and strengthen the efforts that will be needed for environmental preservation from this point on. Its principal content is as follows:

- (1) Upgraded conservation policies (tighter total emissions restrictions for water quality that target nitrogen and phosphorous; preservation of seaweed beds, tidal flats and other areas; consideration for environmental preservation when excavating gravel from the ocean and building landfills)
- (2) Policies to restore good environments that have been lost (restoration of seaweed beds, tidelands, natural coastlines and other environments that have been lost due to development and the like)
- (3) Promotion of wide-ranging cshouji operation and participation (strengthening of wide-ranging cooperative relationships among the national government, local governments, residents, companies and other entities)

In the future, relevant prefectures will alter their prefectural plans to reflect the content of the Basic Plan. This will be an excellent opportunity to intensify efforts aimed at environmental preservation of the Seto Inland Sea.