

Toward Effective Revision of the Seto Inland Sea Law

Etsuko Abe

The Law on Special Measures for the Environmental Conservation of the Seto Inland Sea (Seto Inland Sea Law) states that the Seto Inland Sea "... is a place of great scenic beauty unparalleled not only in Japan but throughout the world, and a treasure-trove of precious fishing resources for the people of Japan. Its bounties must be enjoyed equally by the people of Japan and must be passed on to future generations..." However, since the Law was enacted, the environment of the Seto Inland Sea has continued to decline due to successive reclamation operations, dumping of wastes, excavation of sand from the ocean floor and so on.

The ocean around the planned site of the Kaminoseki Nuclear Power Plant in Nagashima, which is slated for reclamation, has a precious natural environment and ecology praised by researchers both at home and abroad as a "paradise among paradises." In the ocean of the planned site, finless black porpoise swim and many kinds of rare organisms flourish. The ocean environment has been preserved in its natural state. A branch of the Kuroshio (Japan) Current flowing in via the Bungo Channel between Kyushu and Shikoku causes a phenomenon that has been called "a tiny Pacific Ocean within the Seto Inland Sea." This region, in which the original landscape of the Seto Inland Sea still remains, should be preserved as is for future generations.

The problem of waste dumping is also becoming more and more serious. Examples include Teshima, which has been struggling to deal with half a million tons of illegally dumped wastes, and the plan for the Dejima reclamation in the Port of Hiroshima.

Moreover, the excavation of sand from the ocean floor robs the sand eel and many other sea creatures of their habitats. It also encroaches on the shoreline and has caused the classic Japanese seashore of gently sloping shallows and white beaches and green pines to disappear. In some excavated areas, the seafloor has been scooped out to a depth of more than 40 meters. It is said that once sea sand – a resource for fossilization – is destroyed, it is extremely difficult to restore it to its natural state.

The Pan-Seto Inland Sea Congress wishes to pass on the rich natural environment of the Seto Inland Sea to future generations. For this reason, we are working toward the goal of revising the Seto Inland Sea Law to give it practical effectiveness.