

Problems Facing the Seto Inland Sea Region in the 21st Century

Tomotoshi Okaichi

The Seto Inland Sea is the largest semi-enclosed coastal sea in Japan, covering an area of 20,000 square kilometers. With a watershed covering an area of 32,930 km², it is easily affected by pollution from land regions; although their frequency has decreased, "red tides" still continue to occur. Fisheries production has been declining since around 1990. However, in 1999, production was 265,000 tons for ocean fishing and 315,000 tons for fish cultivation. Thus among semi-enclosed coastal seas, the Seto Inland Sea, like Chesapeake Bay, continues to be richly favored by the bounties of the sea. This is due in large part to the Law on Special Measures for the Environmental Conservation of the Seto Inland Sea and other administrative measures, as well as the environmental conservation efforts of researchers, citizen's groups and the like.

However, there are still many problems that remain to be solved. The Seto Inland Sea is made up of 13 ocean regions, each with a different nature. Moreover, 1015 islands, 160 of which are inhabited (with a total population of 486,000), dot the sea or cluster together in the open sea or the straits. These form complex currents that help to disperse pollutants, and there are also seaweed beds and tidal flats remaining in their vicinity. However, until the problem of industrial waste dumping in Toyoshima in Kagawa Prefecture was revealed, one wonders how much interest there was in the function of islands and the lifestyles of the people who live on them as an environmental issue. When we consider the issue of preserving the environment of the Seto Inland Sea, first we must preserve the natural and social environments of such islands. Only then will we be able to show them to the rest of the world and take pride in their scenic beauty.

We tend to think of the entire Seto Inland Sea as a single ocean region. However, there are prefectural boundary lines in the ocean, and it is difficult for individual prefectures to evaluate the environmental problems in the ocean fronting their prefecture in terms of their relationship to the overall Seto Inland Sea. There are many differences among coastal prefectures in terms of industries and lifestyle patterns, and there is no simple solution that will work in all cases. It is for this reason that the Governors and Mayors' Conference on the Environmental Management of the Seto Inland Sea feels that it is essential to work toward an environmental conservation for the 21st century, pursuing solutions to problems with the holistic perspective pointed out at the Stockholm EMECS conference, and building a

governance organization to incorporate wide-ranging views from researchers and private citizens. The Research Institute for the Seto Inland Sea is also working toward this goal through the holding of research forums and workshops, but there is still much more that needs to be done, and we intend to pursue further research in these areas.