

Citizen Responses to Development in the Seto Inland Sea Region

Harvey A. Shapiro
Osaka Geijutsu University, Japan

The Seto Inland Sea is Japan's largest enclosed coastal sea. It has been important throughout Japanese history culturally, economically and as a source of food. Its beauty has led it to be called "the Mediterranean of the Orient." Pollution was relatively rare until the early 1960's, the start of Japan's period of rapid economic growth. Giant landfills built along the Sea's coast for huge industrial and petro-chemical complexes etc. sprung up throughout the region. The results were terrible occurrences of air and water pollution, oil spills, red tides and great fish kills, and loss of access as well as destruction of the region's fabled scenic beauty.

In this paper, some representative citizen responses to these and other environmental insults will be introduced. The first is the 33-day hunger strike by one citizen in Wakayama City in 1969 to protest an industry's plan to fill a nearby beach. That beach remains intact today as a result of his effort nearly 25 year ago. Next, there is Japan's first National Trust movement which began in 1974. It is a land-purchase movement to protect a valuable tideland, called Tenjinzaki in the city of Tanabe, Wakayama Prefecture, from upland development and its impacts by the purchase of that threatened upland area. Donations were collected nationwide and even from overseas. The threatened site was purchased and put in trust in 1982. Third is the Access Rights Movement which began in 1973 in the city of Takasago on the Inland Sea coast west of Kobe. Its purpose is to get the right of coastal access, a customary action, legally recognized. However, that movement stalled in 1988 due to illness of its leader, though construction of an artificial beach and fishing pier on the city's waterfront, both with free coastal access, can be seen as concrete accomplishments. Next is the People's Alliance to Protect the Seto Inland Sea founded in the city of Akashi, west of Kobe, in 1972. It consists of over 200,000 members belonging to 43 coastal organizations. Its effort was partially responsible for enactment of the Seto Inland Sea Environmental Protection Act in 1977. It is closely allied with scientists and is legally and politically active; one of its officials, a lawyer, ran for Prefectural governor in 1982.

A few of the more recent movements include the Osaka Bay Citizens' Council, established in 1985 and led by famous sports fishermen. It developed and published a detailed map of coastal conditions and accessibility for the entire Osaka Bay Coast in 1988. That group is now part of a National Citizens' Bay Environmental Protection Network. Finally, there is the National Beach Restoration Movement, established in Himeji City, west of Kobe, in 1988 to study ways, with scientists, of replacing concrete landfill seawalls with artificial accessible beaches.