

The 14th Marine Litter Summit 2016 Mie Conference Toba Appeal

Introduction

Oceans provide us with so much – they are indeed the common heritage of mankind. There is deep concern that the vast amounts and types of litter that ends up in the ocean are having an adverse impact on marine biodiversity and human health. Litter washing up along our shores is only a small part of our household trash that makes its way down rivers to the sea, or waste that ends up overboard off the coast.

To coordinate the collection of litter and prevent waste from being generated, NGOs and NPOs across various regions and globally are working with government bodies, residents, researchers and private businesses to help make a difference.

Toba City in Mie Prefecture has produced a DVD that covers the issue of marine litter in an effort to raise awareness amongst residents. Throughout fiscal year 2015, a total of 1,500 volunteers joined cleanup activities and collected 45 tons of litter from along our shorelines. The issue of marine litter is increasing in severity throughout the Mie Prefecture, and we recognize that this needs to be addressed by the entire region. We have pioneered efforts to coordinate activities by residents and government bodies across all regions and administrative areas.

Following the commitment of last year's G7 Leader's Declaration, the G7 Ise-Shima Leaders' Declaration at the Ise-Shima Summit held in Mie Prefecture declared, "We reaffirm our commitment to address marine litter, recognizing that our efforts on resource efficiency and the 3Rs also contribute to the prevention and reduction of marine litter, particularly plastic, from land-based sources".

We held "the 14th Marine Litter Summit 2016 Mie Conference" (hereafter, the Mie Conference) over three days from October 28 in Ise City and Toshijima in Toba City, covering three topics: biodiversity and marine litter; preventing plastic litter washing ashore; and coordination around the Asia Pacific region. The conference involved members from the government, local administrative bodies and private businesses, as well as researchers, residents and staff from Japanese and international NGOs and NPOs, to share information through presentations, constructive debate and discussion.

Biodiversity and marine litter

Over the past several years since the National Biodiversity Strategy of Japan was finalized in 2012, there have been improvements to investigative studies on marine pollution caused by microplastics. Various studies raised concerns over the adverse impact that pollution will have in the future on the entire ecosystem, including human health.

In light of such concerns, discussions aimed at revising the next iteration of the National Biodiversity Strategy led to plastic litter being raised as one of the most pressing issues related to marine pollution. We call for action and support to incorporate efficient and systematic policies into the strategy to address this issue.

We also propose that NGOs and NPOs work together to examine what types of harm plastic litter is causing to wildlife and identify current situations, while looking at existing cases in countries and regions around the Asia Pacific region.

Reduction and Prevention of Plastic Litter Entering the Ocean

In the lead-up to the G7 Ise-Shima Summit, NGOs and NPOs presented a message entitled, “To the Leaders and People of G7 Member States: Proposals for Pursuit of Genuine Prosperity through River Basin Thinking.” Referring to the case study, “22nd Century Nasanohama Project,” which was launched in 2012 by environmental groups in Ise Bay basin areas in Mie, Gifu and Aichi prefectures addressing the issue of marine and river litter, the message proposed to “advocate the ‘Ise Bay Initiative’, aiming to realize a sustainable and productive future based on bio-regional thinking beyond our perspective and values. Presenting the following experience and good practices, it proposes to the leaders and the people of G7 member states to share the idea of “Ise Bay Initiative” and work together internationally for a better future.”

The Mie Conference shared the details of this proposal, and also on the basis of reports of microplastics present within river systems in Japan, called for studies to be conducted to identify the actual state of microplastics in coastal waters and how they are being released into river basins.

Another approach suggested by the Mie Conference attendees was to use the Ise Bay river basin area as a model and encourage national and local government bodies, NGOs and NPOs, private businesses, residents and researchers to coordinate efforts for developing effective policies aimed at reducing plastic litter and to publish any findings on a national and international level.

Cooperation among Asia-Pacific Region

Immense quantities of debris were washed away into the oceans in the aftermath of the 2011 Great East Japan earthquake and floated offshore with some quantities washing ashore around America and Canada. Communities along those coastlines embarked on cleanup activities, while also respecting the Japanese people affected by the disaster.

Tsunami debris also revived concerns over the issue of plastic litter in the aquatic environment. Ocean pollution caused by plastic litter ending up into the sea as a result of natural disasters or ordinary human activities is a global issue, and the need for international efforts extending beyond regional or national boundaries was reaffirmed at the Mie Conference.

Similar to compensation funds that are available to cover damage resulting from oil spills, we will call for relevant organizations to establish an international fund to protect our precious oceans from pollution caused by plastic litter.

In conclusion

In addition to expanding cleanup activities along coastlines and rivers around Ise Bay so that we may continue to enjoy its rich fisheries products in a sustainable manner, the Mie Conference shared the importance of shifting from today's production, consumption and disposal-oriented society, to a resource recycling and circular economy structure, particularly with regards to plastic products.

People living along Ise Bay and other coastlines and rivers around Japan need to work together with those living in the Asia Pacific basin and around the world who are addressing the issue of marine litter. To facilitate this, we will continue taking action to incorporate the suggestions raised at the Mie Conference.

October 30th, 2016

The 14th Marine Litter Summit 2016 Mie Conference
Volunteer appeal

The 14th Marine Litter Summit 2016 Mie Conference Toba Appeal
【Supplement】

The following items are presented in conjunction with the main text as a summary of additional opinions and thoughts from the discussions of the participants gathered and sorted at the 14th Marine Litter Summit 2016 Mie conference in regards to the Toba Appeal.

1. Basic Understanding

- We must recognize firmly that the sea is the common property of all living creatures on earth including mankind and not just the “the common heritage of mankind” as stated in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- To promote the society wide understanding of the issues with marine litter, we must put effort in communicating the issue to wider audiences at every opportunity.

2. Biodiversity and Marine Litter

- An eco-label is needed as the international standard that tells consumers that the product is harmless to the biodiversity.
- In the fisheries and aquaculture industry also, it is important to reduce the use of products such as Styrofoam that leads to marine litter.

3. Reduction and Prevention of Plastic Litter Entering the Ocean

- Towards the reduction of plastic products, 3R (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) need to be furthered with a particular emphasis on the concept of reduce.
- Extended Producer Responsibility of companies is now being widely recognized in Europe and the U.S. In Japanese society also, we shall seek to spread the concept for the mitigation of marine litter.
- In Mie prefecture, the use of single use plastic has been successfully reduced in light of climate change mitigation. Nation wide adoption of this regional success as a model would be an effective strategy for reducing marine litter.
- Microbeads play relatively small role in the marine micro plastic pollution. However, they can easily be prevented from reaching the sea by banning the use. This warrants a swift introduction of a policy banning the use of microbeads instead of just leaving it up to consumer decision.
- We propose to set up facilities, such as water filling stations, to reduce the use of single use containers like PET bottles towards the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics.

4. Cooperation among Asia-Pacific Region

- As a source of international fund, we propose to charge a fee for manufacture and sales of plastic products. This would encourage favorable consumer decisions on purchasing and would lead to reduction of excessive production, consumption, and waste of plastic products.
- Together with setting up an international fund, it would be necessary to set up a third party institution responsible for fair and just distribution of the fund.

5. Other

- We shall devise ways to invite more children who are the future generation into activities of NPOs and the like to conserve the local marine or river environment.
- As marine litter problem has the nature that warrants all people to be aware of, we shall work towards having it be part of the school text such as in primary schools as a first step to create the shared understanding of the problem.

End.