

Kyoto Danish Seine Fishery Federation Snow Crab And Flathead Flounder



© Tom Seaman / Fishing News International



DATE CERTIFIED 19 September 2008

SPECIES Snow crab (*Chionoecetes opilio*); flathead flounder (*Hippoglossoides dubius*)

FISHING METHOD Danish seine net

COUNTRY Japan

LOCATION



The Sea of Japan, within Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone

FISHERY TONNAGE 91 tonnes snow crab (2009); 220 tonnes flathead flounder

“OUR OBJECTIVE IS to pass on bounteous seas to future generations,” said Tetsuya Kawaguchi, Chairman of the Kyoto Danish Seine Fishery Federation (KDSFF), on achieving MSC certification last year. “We will continue to improve the Danish seine fishery with our love of the Sea of Kyoto.”

It sounds sentimental, but the 315km stretch of coast where the fleet is based inspires a deep, almost mystical affection. Situated to the north of Kyoto, its midpoint is the rugged spur of Cape Kyogamisaki. To the west are dunes, cays and reefs bathed by the Tushima Warm Ocean Current; to the east is Wakasa Bay, a quasi-national park.

Low-impact fishing

The 15 vessels of the KDSFF fleet operate in the Kyoto Offshore Fishing Area that begins about 50km out from the Kyoto Prefecture coast, as it is called. Each fishes with a single Danish seine net, a gear type that does not have the heavy chains associated with impacts on seabed ecosystems.

Towed on very long warps, the Danish seine is hauled until the ropes become parallel, signalling that the net is full. This occurs after an hour to 90 minutes, and haul time cannot be extended after that – unlike in a trawl fishery. Anecdotally, the shorter the haul time, the lower the incidence of damaged fish and the higher the market return. This provides an economic incentive to comply with regulations in terms of haul times and net design.

The size of net, mesh size and cod end (the back of the net) vary depending on whether flounder or crab is being targeted. To minimise bycatch, the Kyoto Institute of Oceanic and Fishery Science (KIOFS) developed a variation – the selective seine net – which uses angled panels to retain flounder and larger sized fishes while returning snow crab, star fish, sea anemones and shrimp on to the seabed.

Selective seine nets have been mandatory since 2006, and other local government controls include vessel permits, closed fishing seasons and sanctuaries (around nursery and

spawning areas) where snow crab cannot be fished due to the installation of concrete blocks that prevent bottom trawling.

Beyond legal requirements

In 1999, when snow crab numbers were in decline, KDSFF members opted voluntarily for further controls. These included a minimum size of 100mm carapace width for immature ‘soft shell’ males that have not yet bred. This and other self-imposed restrictions go way beyond the legal requirements for vessels from the two other prefectures that are also allowed to fish in the area. Since achieving MSC certification, there has been an additional voluntary measure prompted directly by the certifiers’ recommendations. “To stimulate snow crab recovery further, we have, under the guidance of the Institute (KIOFS), prohibited the fishing of all soft-shell males on a trial basis,” Hamanaka says. “This marks a major step towards furthering stock preservation.”

Stock recovery plan

Though recovery plans were in place for flathead flounder and snow crab, initiated by the Japanese government in 2003, the MSC has given them a new impetus. One condition of certification was that, by September 2009, a date should be specified for complete snow crab recovery. “We are in the process of discussing that,” Hamanaka says. “Given the life cycle of the species, we believe that around ten years is appropriate.” Until then, stocks will be harvested according to a recovery plan based on precautionary measures.

For the Kyoto fishery, of course, a decade is nothing. Flathead flounder has been fished here since the 1340s and snow crab since 1800. “We hope that acquiring MSC certification will encourage fishers to work even harder towards improving and strengthening our eco-fishery operations,” Hamanaka says – and already it is paying commercial dividends. Immediately after certification, the major Japanese retailer Aeon placed its first order for flathead flounder – and local consumer cooperatives are about to follow suit.



“Effective and sustainable fisheries management requires not only the participation of fisheries operators, but of consumers as well. The Kyoto Danish Seine Fishery Federation has a long history of sustainable fisheries management. MSC certification helps the fishery communicate about their sustainable management practices and gives consumers a possibility to go for the best environmental choice when buying seafood and with this choice reward sustainable fisheries management”

Dr Atsushi Yamasaki, Fisheries Biologist of the Kyoto Institute of Oceanic and Fishery Science

“Even when a fishery is making an effort to preserve and increase fish stocks using eco-friendly fishing practices, it is hard to get this across to consumers. That is why we decided to aim for MSC certification”

Takashi Hamanaka, Secretariat, Kyoto Danish Seine Fishery Federation