Some Impressions gained from Study Tour A

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I must say how glad I was to have chosen to have gone on the conference pre tours.

Pre Tour A gave me a sense of Japan as an island in the north Pacific. Going to the north east coast was very interesting as we clearly saw how the complex currents off the coast made the fisheries vary in abundance and type. The route to the north coast gave a sense of rural Japan, with rice fields and hills.

The actual coastal villages were great in their fisheries feel and in the enthusiasm evident among fishers, market stall holders and the tour staff. I think most of us who stood in the sun shine trying to work out what the large cylindrical machine (6 meters high and about 8 meters wide) was, were grateful to have the help of the staff in identifying it as a nori seaweed net seeder! This and the aquaculture farms, gave a perspective on how the integration of aquaculture and harvest fisheries can work.

We had several instructional speakers along the way and this helped to demystify the cooperative fishery association structure. We were relieved to find that the fisheries administrator in Japan found that we were an easy group to talk to...compared to fishermen! We could all identify with this.

And of course there was the whale meat. We first were offered some in the provincial fish markets. Surprised to see it sashimi style, one lady stall holder enabled us all to try some and refused to take payment! It was like tuna, but did not "melt in the mouth", and was slightly more beefy..."marine beef". (On returning home I got out my old book on "Whales and Irish whaling" and found that when a whale beached in Ireland in the 1800s, the local poor in the community often fell on it and called it, "course beef"). We also tried a sea pineapple sashimi style..fibrous and a sort of sea something or other…..lets just say, it was a more acquired taste!

We also saw the old tuna port at Shiogama. The tuna port was a veritable memorial to the far seas tuna fleet that roamed the world’s oceans in the golden years of the tuna fishery (1950s and 1960s). In an old data file I found recently, it appears there were in excess of 3,500 tonnes of Bluefin tuna landed here in the early 1970s, plus other species from the tropical Pacific. It was a massive concrete port structure with offices up above the floor clearly designed to enable the staff above keep an eye on the discharging vessels and fish auctions below. A look in the offices revealed a time capsule of the tuna industry from that time….certificates of achievement on the walls, boxes and boxes of old paperwork…just going no where. I had to wonder was this the implications of extended fisheries jurisdiction….did we realize this would happen when the UNLOS regime came in?

And the lunch on Matsushita Bay…a banquet box on board a boat. The miso soup here was really fishy and it had a rural taste…”just like granny used to make it” we reckoned. In fact the lady serving the soup was rather taken by our recognizing it’s innate qualities and we managed to
negotiate a second bowl with no Japanese language skills and just a bit of international sign language.

And the banquet box itself...well we had several lunch boxes on the trip, and goodness only knows what some of the delicacies were! All sorts of things......... I usually found my self reverting to my fishery science marine biology 101...animal, vegetable, phyla etc .... “Now this is clearly a cross section of an octopus leg....etc”....I found those “economists with little biology” around were leaning on my every diagnosis! (trusting indeed!). Being puzzled by some items, I was able to pronounce to those around that the tempura fried object...was on close inspection, a slice of green pepper, and not some denizen of the deep! What excitement.... and an interesting way to eat.

And finally back to Tokyo by the bullet train. We liked it, as it made the country from the train window pass by at about twice the normal rate...and the lady serving from the trolley ...this was a Japanese version of Dr Who’s tardis.....she could lean under that trolley and get you anything...like pulling you a draft beer (yes, she had a mini-keg under there!)...and could even find you an very ornately cut egg-mayo crust less sandwich as eaten by the Queen ....not to mention offering you a snack of smoked vacuum packed scallop meat, for about what would buy you your first car back home......(as economists we were always doing the exchange rate calculations!)

What a good tour. We were looked after excellently and it was so good to have those days. I saw a little bit of the real Japan. A big thank you to Yoshi Matsuda, Yamamoto and all who helped make this a memorable experience.