

## **Fish is the “Treasure of the island”**

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Generally, there are abundant marine resources around an island, but the market size of islands is small. Given that all the marine products caught cannot be consumed on the island, many of them are shipped to the mainland of Kagoshima Prefecture or Okinawa Prefecture. Although there are some fee subsidies from Amami Promotion Projects, shipping off islands nevertheless requires considerable labor and cost. The market price of marine products carried over time often remains low because long periods have elapsed since they were caught. In other words, these products face the dual issue of decreased market unit price due to the long periods that have elapsed since they were caught, even when the products were shipped at a high cost. These are the characteristics of the fishing industry of remote island areas, including the Amami Islands.

However, advances in scientific technologies may alleviate some of the disadvantages faced by these remote island fishery industries. A representative example of this is quick freezing technology. There are several techniques such as liquid freezing and proton freezing, but a common element among these is freezing fresh seafood and thawing it appropriately to produce a “close to fresh” taste. The deterioration of freshness due to long-term transportation can be prevented, so this has been introduced on one after another remote island regions. Efforts to introduce rapid freezers and produce fish products have begun even in the Amami and Tokara Islands.

Is it possible to breathe new life into the island fishery industry through the introduction of the freezer? Unfortunately, the answer to this question is “no.”

The introduction of freezers has allowed the successful production of high-quality “produced goods,” but there are many efforts which have not found a final destination, such as where to sell these as “commercial products.” Fishermen have focused on direct sales using the internet and participated in various business meetings, but there are few cases where sufficient sales channels could be secured. Although one would like to place hope in the fishery cooperatives’ sales abilities, managing fishery cooperatives has been very difficult in recent years, and these cooperatives do not have time to spare for opening individual sales to restaurants and mass retailers outside the islands.

Without a destination, these “produced goods” simply accumulate in freezers as inventory. Simply introducing the freezer does not benefit fishermen.

What I want to investigate here is collaboration with private companies that have sales abilities. In other words, this is the building of relationships where the specialized skills of catching specialists (fishermen) and selling specialists (private businesses) are utilized to sell high-quality “produced goods” as excellent “commercial products” to consumers. In reality, the collaboration between producers and private companies is also advancing on remote

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islands in Kagoshima Prefecture. The relationship of rapidly freezing very fresh catch, after which companies in the prefecture take on the role of sales, has been implemented in Nakanoshima (Toshima village), and private businesses have been positioned as one of the important shipping destinations. This kind of relationship building is about to spread to Yoronjima and Koshikishima as well.

We would like to not only focus on shipping outside the island, but also the development of the island market. What kinds of seafood are handled as mass retailers, restaurants, accommodation facilities, and so on, on the island? Is there no room for marine products from the island? Imported salmon and mackerel are delicious, but there is even more delicious seafood in the Amami Islands. The demand of each individual store is limited, but this may be a substantial when put together. We hope for producers to actively provide this information.

The number of tourists entering the Amami Islands is increasing due to the launch of low-cost carriers and the arrival of cruise ships. There have also been full-scale efforts for World Heritage registration. What attracts these tourists are the nature, culture, people, and food of the Amami Islands.

Colorful fish are unloaded every day around the Amami Islands. We would like to promote the development of the off-island market while utilizing the sales abilities of private companies without dropping the freshness of the fish. We would like to provide abundant local fish to tourists visiting the Amami Islands in cooperation with the producers and restaurants. I would like to capture the stomach of a tourist with fish, and increase the number of fans of Amami because the fish of the Amami Islands are “treasures of the island” with much value and potential.



**Local fish sashimi will no longer be available if the fishing industry disappears from the Amami Islands.**