Japanese Commitment to Resource Management as World Leader

Distributors, processors and fishery stakeholders established the Precious Coral Protection and Development Association in 2009 with the objective of preserving traditional culture through conservation and propagation of precious coral for future generations.

The Association is contemplating the following activities:

- Hosting international fora (Hong Kong 2009, Kochi 2012, Taipei 2014)
- Controlling fisheries and promoting resource management on an international level
- Supporting academic research by specialized institutions
- Lobbying national and prefectural administrations to conduct stock assessment
- Processing technique and capacity building
- Supporting educational and promotional activities for sustainable use of precious coral

Japan has been in close contact with precious coral since the Tempyo era (8th century). Precious coral fishery started to thrive during the Meiji era (late 19th century). The high quality of the Japanese red coral, Paracorallium japonicum, is praised all over the world. While conservation of this precious coral has attracted public attention in recent years, the Japanese coral industry leads the world with its rigorous research and management of the resources.

Treasure of Shoso-in

Kanai Sange

Kawatari imported from the Mediterranean

Precious Coral in Shoso-in transported along the silk road:

Precious coral fishery started during the Edo era (1603-1868). The Mediterranean coral, such as Italian coral, was valued in various parts of the world before this era. In Japan, the oldest precious coral in existence is the one used, since mid-8th century, for Hokan (mitre) in Shoso-in (a treasure house in Nara). Emperor Shomu is said to have used the Hokan for Kaigen-E (open the eyes’ ceremony consecrating a newly made Buddhist statue) at the completion of the statue of Buddha in the Todai-ji temple. Precious coral brought from the Mediterranean was called Kawatari and was transported through Persia.

Precious Coral popularized through the Nanban trade:

Many products were brought to Japan after the medieval era, and the Mediterranean precious coral was imported to Japan through the Nanban trade (trade with Europeans) during the Edo era. Rich merchants valued the precious coral as luxury material needed for kanzashi (hair ornament) and netsuke (miniature sculpture used for hanging objects from sash) to the extent that a sumptuary law was designed by the Tokugawa shogunate to regulate this habit.

Precious Coral work is Japanese Traditional Craft:

Art of precious coral work flourished during the Edo era. During the Meiji era when the precious coral fishery thrived, the manufacturing technology was further developed and a number of art works were produced.

Precious Coral Protection and Development Association

(c/o Japan Coral Association)

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Global Guardian Trust (GGT)
Precious Coral is Exotic Deep Sea Creature.

**Precious Coral, Octocorallia** is different from Reef-Building Coral, Hexacorallia:
The reef-building coral found in the shallow water and the precious coral in the deep sea are classified into different categories. While both of them belong to cnidarian, only the precious coral has a hard skeleton that can be used for making jewelry. Corals feed on plankton they catch, using the tentacles on their epithelium (outer layer).

Various Species of Precious Corals:
Eight (8) species of precious corals are used in the world. The Japanese precious corals are akasangō (C. japonicum), momoir sango (C. elatus) and shiro sango (C. konojō), all of which are known for their high quality. They are found at depths from 70 - 300m below sea level to the south of Sagami Bay (southwest of Tokyo) in the West Pacific.

Distribution of Precious Corals in the World:
Precious coral is found in the Mediterranean and the West Pacific. The precious coral is mainly harvested in the Mediterranean, the East China Sea, off the island of Taiwan, and the Japanese islands of Okinawa, Kagoshima, Nagasaki, Kochi, as well as the Ogasawara Island off Tokyo.

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The Precious Coral Fishery is a Nature-Friendly Traditional Fishery.

Most of the precious coral fisheries operating in Japan are very simple nature-friendly fisheries. The technique utilized is to hang several nets attached to a weight above the sea bottom, turn off the engine, pull the tangle nets along the tidal current, then entangle and pull off corals. This technique has not significantly changed since the Meiji era. Pulling the nets along the tidal current does little damage to the sea bottom. Furthermore, it is impossible to deplete coral which grows on uneven topography of the sea bottom, therefore, an excellent way to conserve the resource.

Coral Tangle Net used in the West Waters of Kochi Prefecture

- 7m long arm (timber)
- Chain (Weight)
- 4-5 nets attached
- Pull the rope attached to the vessel (approx.180m long)

Coral Tangle Net used in the East Waters of Kochi Prefecture

- 4 nets attached by a rope
- Pull the rope attached to the vessel (approx.180 m long)

Conceptual Diagram of Precious Coral Fishery

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Conservation of the Valuable Resources with Strict Regulation

A precious coral fishery is regulated by the Prefectural Fisheries Adjustment Regulations. In case of violation, the fishermen will suffer some kind of punishment or have their permit revoked.

- **Number of vessels**: The number of permits is limited, and access to the fishery is not open to newcomers.
- **Seasonal closure**: Closed seasons are January to February and June to July (spawning season). Harvest is affected by the oceanic condition, and fishing is not conducted throughout the fishing season. Fishing days are no more than 100 per year.
- **Hours of operation**: from sunrise to 15:00
- **Fishing method**: The engine must be turned off while pulling the nets. The number of arms is limited to one.
- **Size of the coral**: Coral with a diameter of less than 7 mm at 3 cm from the root, still rooted to a stone, is released.
- **Reporting of catch**: A daily catch report is submitted for the approval of the prefecture by the fisherman.
- **Annual catch limit**: 750kg of live red coral
- **No-take zone**: A no-take zone is established in each fishing ground for conservation and enhancement of the resources.

Live red coral is called selki (live tree), and coral with dead polyp (animal form) is called kareki (dead tree). The skeleton of kareki can also be used for precious coral.