

the course of a long term business relationship with Japanese buyers. However, he noted it was important to recognize that grading standards vary from importer to importer in Japan.

The Tokyo Seafoods representative noted that the situation of arbitrary grading happens from time to time and both Canadians and Japanese need to address jointly the problem of quality but both sides also need to be profitable. He criticized Japanese buyers in general for not having a firmer policy on grade standards and for the ambiguity on both sides on the question of what constitutes acceptable grade standards. He supported a movement towards mutually agreed standards as a means of overcoming this problem and noted that as buyers and sellers we cannot continue to sacrifice quality for profit. He proposed two options. (1) buyers should make firm decisions on whether to buy or not to buy or (2) introduce agreed minimum standards to guide both producers and buyers.

With respect to specific quality criteria, the representative of Nicherei suggested that freshness is the most important element in establishing quality norms. The freshness of the fish ensures the freshness of the roe. Emphasis should be placed on ensuring stable quality from year to year not on whether a company produces grade 1, 2, 3 etc. The Japanese side cited the uncertainty of the roe business with supply/price fluctuations from year to year and reiterated that consistent quality must be the basis for stabilizing prices.

The Canadian side welcomed the candid views from Japanese importers and noted that comments relative to general quality improvement would be passed on to both buyers and fishermen in Canada with the message to encourage freshness, to take care in sorting product for roe production, to improve handling in plants and to ensure proper freezing. The Canadian side expressed the view that these would be significant but relatively low cost steps to upgrade the quality of Canadian herring roe. However, it was also noted that Canadian packers are less certain about how to define quality in terms of specific grades and that while in the longer term it might be beneficial to establish mutually agreed standards, it is possible in the short term to improve quality even without specific grade specifications. In this regard the Canadian side indicated a preparedness to examine minimum