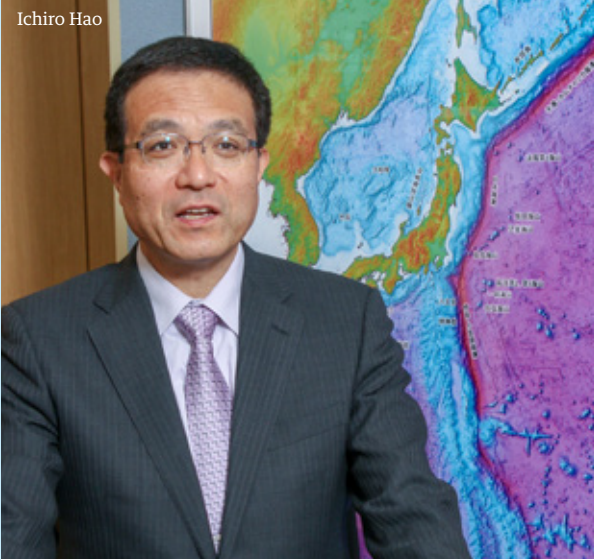


Promoting Ocean Policy

Ichiro Hao



JAPAN has always protected and made the most of the sea that surrounds it. Amidst changes in the country's marine environment, Japan set out the Basic Act on Ocean Policy in 2007 and released a Basic Plan in March 2008. Ten years on, we asked Ichiro Hao, Director General of the National Ocean Policy Secretariat, Cabinet Office about the 3rd Basic Plan on Ocean Policy.

It has been ten years since the Basic Act on Ocean Policy came into effect. What was the background to the Act and what was its purpose?

The enactment of the Basic Act on Ocean Policy was prompted by a whole host of ocean-related issues that were becoming apparent at the time. The ocean was playing an increasingly key role in securing food, resources and energy, transporting cargo, and maintaining the environment, for example. Other issues included contamination of the marine environment, declining fishery resources, and a string of incidents that could potentially impact on Japan's marine interests.

The Basic Act on Ocean Policy outlined guiding principles on ocean-related matters, and set out the foundations for ocean policy, including the formulation of the Basic Plan on Ocean Policy. It also specified the establishment of the Headquarters for Ocean Policy, headed by the Prime Minister, with the aim of comprehensively and systematically addressing ocean policy across all government ministries and agencies.

I work for the National Ocean Policy Secretariat, Cabinet Office which was set up to bring all of these areas together within the government and push full steam ahead.

What have been the key points in ocean policy over the last decade?

The 2nd Basic Plan on Ocean Policy was formulated in 2013. It set out a number of priorities aimed at establishing Japan as a maritime country, including "International cooperation and contribution to international community," "Wealth and prosperity through ocean development and utilization of the sea," "From a country protected by the sea to a country that protects the sea," and "Venturing into the unexplored frontier."

We have continued to work on a raft of measures in the maritime sector over the last ten years. In addition to filing a request to extend Japan's continental shelf, to cover the vast expanse of ocean that comprises roughly half of the country's territory, relevant legislation such as the Act on Punishment of and Measures against Acts of Piracy, the Act on the Preservation of Low-Water Line, and the Act on the Conservation of Remote Islands and Sustainability of Remote Islands' Community have also been enacted.

In December 2017, the Advisory Council for the

National Headquarters for Ocean Policy compiled a report on the 3rd Basic Plan on Ocean Policy, which is due to be formulated in spring 2018.

What were the main points in that report?

Based on evaluation of progress under the 2nd Basic Plan on Ocean Policy, the report recommended that recent changes in Japan's maritime situation should be taken into account when formulating the 3rd Basic Plan on Ocean Policy. In particular, the report stressed the need to fully take into account factors such as recent environmental changes and threats in the oceans surrounding Japan, and progress with initiatives aimed at creating open and stable oceans based on the rule of law. The report also recommended that the existing Basic Act on Ocean Policy be fundamentally restructured, to encompass maritime security on a broader scale, and that proactive measures be taken to guarantee safety and peace of mind for the people of Japan, and safeguard the country's marine interests.

Another area covered in the report was scientific knowledge. That includes taking steps to expand marine resource development and offshore wind power in order to ensure stable supplies of resources and energy, using international frameworks to preserve the marine environment and enable comprehensive management of coastal areas, and securing and developing human resources to establish Japan as a maritime country. The report recommended making plans to push full steam ahead with measures such as these over a five-year period, alongside other measures such as international cooperation and arctic policy.

To implement measures set out in the Basic Plan on Ocean Policy effectively and efficiently, the report recommended stepping up processes to reliably verify, evaluate and review implementation and progress based on process management (PDCA cycle), and advised using easy to understand wording to help members of the public to understand.

The government is currently looking into formulating the 3rd Basic Plan on Ocean Policy based on this report.

International cooperation is likely to play a key role in implementing the Basic Plan on Ocean Policy. What would you consider to be the key points in that respect?

The oceans are governed by international rules that have long been debated and acted upon by many countries around the world, most notably the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The first key point is that countries comply fully with these rules, and establish the rule of law at sea. Maintaining and reinforcing order on the seas through international cooperation, in a free and open manner in accordance with these rules, will in turn enable us to establish a more peaceful and stable international community.

At the same time, there are still numerous maritime issues on a global scale where cause-and-effect are not entirely understood, including global warming. That is why we need to adequately monitor conditions across the oceans, and have a thorough understanding of relevant phenomena. As well as actively contributing to the establishment of a comprehensive oceanographic observation network, based on international cooperation and coordination, it is also important that Japan works to acquire further scientific knowledge through observation, and uses that knowledge to implement rational policies. Implementing measures based on scientific knowledge will be another key point for the future.

From the standpoint of the Basic Plan on Ocean Policy too, I would say that we need to establish these two key points as universal standards throughout the international community, as well as in Japan. ▮

Interview by HITOSHI CHIBA
