

## **Colour of the Sea: The Transparent Seto Inland Sea in Japan**

Joint Representative, Pan-Seto Inland Sea Congress

Toru Ishi

3 May 2025

There is too great a difference among the memoir of a German geographer, Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen, who crossed the Seto Inland Sea in 1860, the sea that I saw as I came to understand things in 1960s, and the sea that I see today in 2025. The Seto Inland Sea is not a true inland sea, but a sea area surrounded by Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu, three of the four main islands of Japan. The Seto Inland Sea is a small 'enclosed' sea by global standards such as the Caspian Sea. I became especially interested in the clear water of the Seto Inland Sea in the 1980s when I was involved in aquaculture.

In the coastal sea, 449 sq km of mudflats and seagrass beds have been reclaimed and replaced by concrete seawalls. The mudflats have lost their ability to purify, and the spread of sewage systems has been promoted as a countermeasure to eutrophication caused by domestic sewage and chemical fertilisers. The loss of the mudflats has reduced the number of migratory birds that fly over the area and has also reduced the ability to supply nutrients to the mountains. As a result, the signs of life in the inland sea have diminished. These major changes have taken place since the 1950s. New public works projects are planned to compensate for the inconvenient truths that large public works projects invite. One of them is that they feed on each other and create a negative cycle.

However, the fact that the measures have been fragmented by the government has prevented the full extent of the transition and the measures from being shared. And the interests involved in large public works projects, as well as the reality that fish for the table can be delivered from the other side of the world, have made even the inner lives of people who look at the inland sea someone else's business. Globally, the economic benefits of ecosystem services provided by natural ecosystems exceed GDP. The changes in the Seto Inland Sea, which seems to be under the "spell" of economic growth, raise a big question for us. We need to examine the facts.

The colour of the clear waters of the Seto Inland Sea may be the colour of the indifference of us modern people.

### **Acknowledgement:**

This recorded video includes an introduction to D-ALEA by Satoshi Murayama, President of the AAEH. The lecture was organised as a Geo-Communication Seminar 58 organised by the International Consortium for Earth and Development Sciences (ICEDS) at Kagawa University. The participants who asked questions and responded in this video are listed below in alphabetical order:

- Kazuya Ishii, Professor, Faculty of Law, Kagawa University, Japan.
- Toru Ishii, Joint Representative, Pan-Seto Inland Sea Congress, Japan.
- Eileen Mikals-Adachi, Associate Professor of Japanese, East Asian Studies, Eckerd College, USA.
- Masashi Miyagawa, Graduate School of Science for Creative Emergence and Aji

Marine Station, Seto Inland Sea Regional Research Center, Kagawa University;  
Visiting Professor of Faculty of Engineering and Design, Japan.

- Satoshi Murayama, Professor Emeritus, ICEDS, Kagawa University, Japan;  
President of the Asian Association for Environmental History (AAEH)
- Toru Terao, Professor, Faculty of Education; Director of the ICEDS, Kagawa  
University, Japan.
- Masataka Yatsuduka, Collaborating Researcher, Faculty of Education, Kagawa  
University, Japan.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Yn5SwH51Xo57x5Fjfgg2NcLoicx9ivtn/view?usp=sharing>