

**Kumamoto oyster (*Crassostrea sikamea*) is abundant in its native habitat,
the northern Ariake Sea, Kyushu.**

Masashi SEKINO

Tohoku National Fisheries Research Institute, Fisheries Research Agency, Japan

The Kumamoto oyster (Kumo, *Crassostrea sikamea*), which has taxonomically close relationship to the Pacific oyster (Pacific, *C. gigas*), is distributed exclusively in the Ariake Sea, Kyushu Island, Japan. Despite that Kumo has commanded little share of trade in the Japanese fishery/aquaculture, this species was first exported to US some sixty years ago and since then it has highly been valued by seafood connoisseurs and west coast oyster culturists as an aquaculture produce. From the view of conservation for the species diversity of oysters, it is of our great concern about the resource status of natural Kumo since previous expeditions in the native habitat have suggested that this species might be threatened, or if not, have reduced resource. In US, on the other hand, from the standpoint of aquaculture much attention has been paid to the maintenance of bona fide Kumos, as it has been shown that some introgression between Kumos and Pacifics occurs, prompting the need to introduce a new broodstock into the US aquaculture. Because of the morphological resemblance between Kumo and Pacific together with the phenotypic plasticity of oyster species in general, it is almost impossible to discriminate the two species on the basis of the morphology, thereby the resource status of Kumo has yet to be clear. Recent advent of molecular techniques, however, allows unambiguously discriminating Kumos from Pacifics. Using such molecular tools, we surveyed the northern parts of Ariake Sea to address the resource status of natural Kumo. We found that Kumo is far from rare species, or rather, it is the dominant oyster in the surveyed areas. In addition, a nuclear DNA marker provided no evidence of natural hybridization between the two species.