

## **Japanese Government Nuclear Briefing**

Various Japanese Government departments (MoFA, METI, MHLW, MAFF) took part in a special briefing at the JETRO Offices on 27 July to highlight recent developments at the troubled Fukushima Nuclear power plant and beef safety issues.

### **Fukushima Daiichi**

TEPCO has completed the step one objective of the "Roadmap towards restoration from the accident at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station". In practice, this means that: "stable cooling" has been achieved within the reactors and the spent fuel pools.

Step two (cold shutdown) is on target to be achieved within six months of completing step one.

Step three or "Mid-term issues" has a timescale of three years from completing step one which will include continued cold shutdown and the removing of the fuel rods and debris surrounding the reactor buildings, creating water treatment facilities and the installation of reactor building containers.

### **Beef Safety Measures**

Noriyuki Shikata, Deputy Cabinet Secretary for Public Relations/Director of Global Communications, Prime Minister's Office gave a presentation on the chronology of events and subsequent actions by the Government. This presentation was followed by an active Q&A session, principally from the foreign community seeking answers to questions arising from the presentation as well as from recent media reports.

In short, the Japanese Government believes the risk to health is minimal and at this time is restricted to beef herds that consumed rice straw prior to slaughter, after the explosions at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant. They are setting up additional testing facilities in all neighbouring prefectures to ensure that proper testing is done. No timescales were provided as to when these will be in place or how they will be staffed. If the local prefecture cannot do this it will be left to the Government to implement the testing and TEPCO will be ultimately responsible for paying the costs of setting up the test facilities and ongoing testing.

You can check the testing of various foods from the Fukushima area at the following website (in English)

<http://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/policy/health-medical/food/index.html>

One area that does require clarification is the Government's assertion that radioactive cesium has a half-life of 60 days in beef cattle. This is at odds with previous advice on the half-life being 30 years. The Government officials have agreed to re-examine this element of their advice.

They also suggested that poultry and pork were not affected owing to the different diets of these animals. However, following several questions from the floor they admitted that radioactive cesium was found in tests though none had exceeded the provisional regulation values provided by the Food Sanitation Act.

Concerns were also raised about the safety of milk. It has been reported in the Nikkei Shinbun that milk produced in the affected area which is above the legal limit for contamination has been diluted with milk from surrounding areas, which have no or little exposure to radiation. This was said to bring the contaminated milk within the legal limit. The Government has agreed to examine this report

What was clear from this briefing is that the Japanese Government wants to be seen to be doing something actively to ensure food safety, but in practice the producers seem able to circumvent the guidance issued to them on 14th April 2011.

The conclusion was: check the government website (above) regularly; check as carefully as you can where the food you buy is being sourced from; and be vigilant to media broadcasts regarding how this sensitive situation develops.

*This report was prepared by the British Chamber of Commerce Japan (BCCJ.)*