

# Beijing fishmongers worry as Japan begins Fukushima water release

August 24 2023, by Peter CATTERALL



China has suspended the import of all Japanese aquatic products over the release of wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear plant.

Seafood sellers in Beijing expressed consternation Thursday over Japan's gradual release of wastewater from the disaster-hit Fukushima nuclear

plant into the ocean.

Hours before the release began, a store manager named Wang Jinglong in one of the Chinese capital's biggest seafood markets told AFP there had already been a "major impact" on his business, especially tuna sales.

"We used to get some fresh Japanese fish, but due to customs bans we stopped receiving them two months ago," Wang said, referring to import controls imposed last month.

Wang showed AFP frozen Japanese seafood products that he will be unable to restock once sold—if customers are still interested.

"There's a large gap in our sales volume compared with before. In the past, such as during the pandemic, we had to kill three to five tuna every week," Wang said.

"Now we kill very few fish and they are not from Japan, but from Australia, New Zealand and Spain."

The 53-year-old said the quality of those products is "very poor, and not comparable to that of Japan".

He said he has little choice in the face of "great resistance" from the public to Japanese products.

"This pollution topic is being closely followed."

The release plan has been endorsed by the International Atomic Energy Agency—the United Nations' nuclear watchdog—which said it meets international standards and "will not cause any harm to the environment".

And the overriding consensus among international experts is that the operation is safe.

But shortly after the discharge of wastewater began on Thursday, China said it would suspend the import of all Japanese aquatic products.



Workers at a major fish market in Beijing said the impact of Japan's Fukushima water release plan had been significant.

Meanwhile, many shoppers responded by rushing to buy large quantities of table salt, prompting the state monopoly to issue a plea for moderation.

Chinese consumers snapped up salt in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima disaster based on groundless rumours that the iodine in it could prevent radiation poisoning.

"Due to the impact of Japan's discharge of nuclear wastewater, some markets in China have seen panic buying of table salt," China Salt said in a statement on Thursday evening.

"Salt reserves and supplies remain abundant," the state-owned firm said, but added that "online retailers as well as some commercial supermarket channels have exhibited temporary shortages".

"We are working overtime to add extra production and deliveries, and doing all we can to guarantee market supply," the company said.

"We urge all sectors of society to consume [salt](#) in a managed way and not blindly hoard it."

Elsewhere in the Beijing market, workers said the impact of the water release plan had been significant.

Many recently stopped selling all seafood from Japan.

"The plan to release the water is causing trouble for Japan and all other countries," said Huang Xiaohao, the boss at a store advertising imported products.

"If you look around at what we're selling, you'll find that most of these things are actually domestic products," he said.

Pressure has come from both official customs restrictions, others said, as well as from consumers who worry about a supposed impact of Japanese seafood products on their health.

One merchant who declined to be named told AFP that tuna from places other than Japan—where he usually sourced products—are simply not as good.

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