6.WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO MINAMATA BAY?

Minamata Bay Reclaimed Land (Eco Park Minamata)

The sludge in Minamata Bay, of which the concentration of mercury was beyond 25 ppm, was dealt with partly by land reclamation and partly by dredging at a cost of approximately 48.5 billion yen over 14 years. The cost was covered by Kumamoto Prefecture. As a result, a portion of Minamata Bay has been transformed into 58 hectares of reclaimed land. The quality of water in Minamata Bay is one of the best in Kumamoto Prefecture in terms of transparency and cleanliness, so one does not need to worry about swimming or playing there. In order to prevent the spread of polluted fish and reassure the residents of the prefecture, the prefecture put dividing nets at the entrance to Minamata Bay in 1974, and enlisted the cooperation of the fishing cooperative to catch fish in the bay. Chisso had been buying the fish that had been caught and had been disposing them.

The concentration of mercury in fish and shellfish in Minamata bay has continued to decrease since Chisso stopped its production of acetaldehyde. It was confirmed that there were no species of fish that contained more mercury than the provisional national standards (0.4 ppm total mercury, 0.3 ppm methyl mercury) according to an investigation conducted by Kumamoto Government in October, 1994. Therefore, the Governor of Kumamoto declared Minamata bay is safe in July, 1997, and the dividing nets were removed in October. Now it can be said that the fish and shellfish in Minamata bay are as safe as those of outside the bay.

Even though the dividing nets had been removed, investigations into the concentration of mercury in fish and shellfish continued to be conducted twice a year for the next three years. Comprehensive data on the sea of Minamata which has experienced such large-scale environmental destruction and the health of the local residents are to be passed on to the rest of the world so the most can be made of the lessons of Minamata disease. In order to do so, long-term observation is needed.