

Ban puts tortoise-shell sector in fight to survive

NAGASAKI (Kyodo) The tortoiseshell industry here is fighting for its life because of an import ban on sea turtles that takes effect this year.

The ban on the turtles, whose shells are used for making combs, glasses frames and other folk craft, has prompted efforts to find substitutes, such as water buffalo horns, or to start a sea turtle farming venture in Cuba.

Nagasaki accounts for 70 percent of the country's tortoiseshell craft production.

But trade in sea tortoises, the raw material for the industry, is banned under the Washington Convention, which aims to protect wild animals and plants facing extinction.

The government had withheld observing part of the convention to protect the local industry. But last June, it reportedly bowed to U.S. pressure and moved to ban imports.

Fumiki Nakakoga, chairman of the Japan Tortoiseshell Industry, said there is enough stock to last about three years.

Consumption is expected to decrease as sales of tortoiseshell items fall with a decline in tourism.

The industry, in cooperation with the Nagasaki Pre-



JEWELRY MADE from water buffalo horn and nails, which are tortoise shell substitutes, are displayed at a shop in Nagasaki. KYODO PHOTO

fectural Industrial Technology Center, meanwhile, has started a project to use substitute materials.

The center developed technology to use waste shell pieces, by grinding them into powder, which is molded into cylinders or plates.

It also succeeded in processing water buffalo horns

and nails, which resemble turtle shells, by processing them with infrared rays and coloring them like the shells.

Shigeyuki Mori, chief of the center's raw material section, said items made of water buffalo horns look almost like those of tortoiseshells and may sell well because they are priced lower.

The industry is also plan-

ning to farm sea turtles in Cuba, which used to be Japan's main source for the shells. Nakakoga said it takes more than five years for sea turtles to grow large enough for their shells to be used in crafts.

The industry's long-term future depends on whether sea turtle farming succeeds, he said.

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