2.3. Port and Harbor Development System

2.3.1. Overview

National port and harbor policy has consistently bolstered Japanese economic growth by providing for planned long-term development of the country’s ports and harbors in response to changing socioeconomic development and port-related demands.

During the initial phase of postwar economic development from around 1950 through the 1960s when the Port and Harbor Law, which sets forth the basic regulations on the development, use and management of ports and harbors in Japan, was introduced, foreign cargo wharves were constructed based primarily on government policy designed to counter excessive ship traffic. Until around 1970 when rapid growth tapered off, the development of large-scale industrial lands and wharves for large specialized bulk carriers designed to establish heavy chemical industrial belts led to the evolution of new industrial metropolitan areas and special areas for industrial development. Container terminals were established in response to the introduction of marine container transport with the formation of foreign cargo wharf public corporations.

The oil crisis decreased economic growth until 1985, during which period container terminals, wharves for automobile bulk carriers and other facilities were constructed to handle the increase in exports. Wharves for imported coal and LNG terminals were also built in order to deal with the diversification of energy sources and ensure a stable supply of energy. Meanwhile we have introduced measures to counter aggravated pollution and also developed green belts and marinas to satisfy the increased demand for recreational facilities.

The long-term port and harbor policy, ‘Ports and Harbors in the 21st Century,’ enacted in 1985 and ‘Developing Affluent Waterfronts,’ following in 1990, were designed to transform ports, which had formerly served solely as distribution and industrial spaces, into high-quality, comprehensive harbor areas that attract community gatherings and are otherwise integrated into the daily lives of residents.

In response to further changes in foreign and domestic socioeconomic environments, the government enacted “Ports in the Age of Global Exchange” in 1995. With the target year of 2010, this long-term port and harbor policy focuses on constructing a port and harbor network and creating harbor areas that contribute to economic activity, as well as provide the community with ample space to relax. Intense international competition brought about by economic globalization highlights the need to strengthen the competitiveness of ports and harbors as hubs of international trade. To revise the high cost structure in the Japanese distribution sector, relevant cabinet ministers worked together in 1997 to enact the “Integrated Distribution Policy” designed to ensure comprehensive steps in terms of distribution policy.
In 1996, the Council for Ports and Harbors set forth its basic policy with regard to future nationwide distribution of container terminals, which will significantly affect distribution routes and costs in Japan. The Council also made recommendations in March 1998 with regard to the course of future container terminal development and operation, targeting reduction of container handling charges. In its 1999 submission, “Port and Harbor Development and Management in Response to Socioeconomic Changes,” the Council addressed four items concerning the future course of Japanese port administration, including the necessity of reinforcing national and wider regional perspectives in development, while also establishing more distinct roles for the national and local governments (port management bodies), in order to construct a more efficient and effective national distribution system.

The development of ports has proceeded systematically according to five-year investment plan for ports and harbors formulated along the lines of each national economic plan. Decisions on the scale of investment during the five-year period of these plans follow Cabinet meetings on the subject. Based on the port development budgets submitted by port management bodies, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport compiles a national level budget for the development of ports and harbors to ensure the systematic implementation of each port’s development plan.

In 2003, the Priority Plan for Social Infrastructure Development was formulated, replacing the former five-year investment plan for ports and harbors.