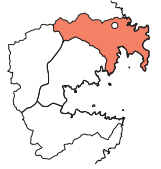


## Despite Taking the Ships Offshore for Safety Minato in Utatsu District



▲Debris around a drifting ship immediately after the tsunami (Shizugawa Bay)

Photo courtesy of Minamisanriku Social Welfare Council

The following relates the experience of fishermen from Minato on the northern fringes of Minamisanriku.

The fishermen have a practice known as *okidashi* for protecting their vessels from tsunamis. Before the tidal change begins, they sail their boats offshore to waters where the impact of a tsunami will be minimal. On the day of the Great East Japan Earthquake, fishermen Oikawa Seiki and Abe Katsuki were barely able to make an escape from the cove as the tide receded noticeably. Dodging the huge swells of the tsunami, they worked desperately to get their boats out to open sea.

After some time passed, however, the rooftops of houses, gas cylinders, and all manner of things started to appear in the water. It was no longer possible to steer the ship, and night fell. Oikawa, Abe and their fellow fishermen moored their four vessels to the wreckage of an aquaculture facility and waited for dawn, all the while protecting their boats by pushing away drifting objects that were floating toward them, one after the other. In constant fear of capsizing, they never got a moment's peace of mind. From time to time, they would turn on the generator and light up the surrounding area. They noticed the roof of the same house floating past them every hour. With terrifying force, a muddy current mixed with rubble was creating a huge eddy.

It was a first-hand experience of how dangerous the practice of *okidashi* can be. The two fishermen commented: "*Okidashi* is not what you should do when there is a big tsunami. The most important thing is to protect your own life, not to worry about the ship."