

[Greetings (Chairman Hirano)]

I am So Hirano from Seijo University, serving as Chairman of the Study Group for the Advancement of Yokkaichi Complex.

I specialize in business history, in particular the history of the heavy chemical industry, such as chemical and oil businesses, and of industrial complexes. Taking advantage of my expertise based on historical perspectives, I have been engaged in projects to enhance the competitiveness of complexes. In addition to the Yokkaichi Complex, I also work for the Kashima Complex (Conference for the Enhancement of Competitiveness of the Kashima Coastal Industrial Zone) and the Keihin Complex (Kawasaki Waterfront Division Revitalization Promotion Council), as well as for the Petroleum and Natural Gas Subcommittee, Natural Resources and Fuel Committee, Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy in the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. I am determined to work with you to contribute to the realization of the advancement of the Yokkaichi Complex, taking into consideration the industrial policies of the national government and each region.

In recent years, the environment surrounding complexes has not been calm. However, overviewing the shipment and value added in manufacturing, we can say that complexes in Japan have maintained their competitiveness. Meanwhile, they are also facing various problems, such as intensified competition caused by emerging countries that are becoming more competitive, aging facilities, difficulties related to skill transfer, and reduction of greenhouse effect gas emissions. When we consider the risk of global supply chain disruptions, maintenance of domestic production is also a vital policy issue. Under such circumstances, enhancement of inter-company collaboration is an essential measure to maintain and increase the competitiveness of the complexes.

The Study Group for the Advancement of Yokkaichi Complex considers the challenges of each company as the challenges of the entire complex, discusses them with the involvement of governments, and takes actions to resolve them. The excellent feature of this study group is its operation based on the proactive discussions by the companies, which is steadily supported by the governments. The companies and governments autonomously work closely together to strengthen their competitiveness and continue to challenge themselves. The study group designs a road map to be addressed by each company in each fiscal year, and the progress is shared among its member companies; this is another point about this study group that attracts me.

The important topics for the future development of the complex are “IoT, hydrogen, and regional cooperation.” On the occasion of the introduction of IoT and big data analysis technology, cooperation and information sharing among companies at the complex will accelerate the accumulation of knowledge and technology, eventually leading to the enhancement of competitiveness. Moreover, utilization of hydrogen, a CO₂-free energy source, is also an important perspective when considering corporate initiatives toward a sustainable society, where business activities and development are continuously conducted while conserving the global environment.

However, there are many unresolved challenges regarding utilization of hydrogen, including the transportation cost, infrastructure development cost under legal regulations, and discovery and expansion of consumers. While it is difficult to resolve such challenges by the effort of a sole company, we need to overcome them with inter-company collaboration and governmental support. The last topic, regional cooperation, has already been in progress in the field of human resources development within the Yokkaichi Complex and other complexes. Knowledge sharing and other forms of regional cooperation will play a greater role in the introduction of IoT and big data and for the realization of a hydrogen economy in years to come.

In closing, I would like to express my sincere hope that the activities of the Study Group for the Advancement of Yokkaichi Complex will help realize more productive and safer businesses, which will lead to the enhancement of competitiveness of the Yokkaichi Complex and regional development as well as the revitalization of industrial complexes across Japan.

So Hirano

Chairman of the Study Group for the Advancement of Yokkaichi Complex