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Muroto Geopark -Our determination to pursue GGN membership and areas needing improvement

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1. Introduction

Muroto is located in one of the most active marginal zones worldwide. This region has been affected by natural disasters including huge earthquakes, tsunamis and typhoons. Despite all these challenges, people have lived enriched lives for over 1000 years on the Muroto Peninsula. Muroto Geopark communicates to the visitors the relationship between its geoheritage, harsh natural environment and people who live in symbiosis with nature. Also it has been utilizing its resources for education, disaster prevention, scientific researches and geotourism. In this presentation, we present our determination to pursue GGN membership, as well as the areas needing improvement, and report our recent progress.

2. Purpose of our geopark activities

Our application for the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) has three purposes.

The first purpose is to communicate the geoscientific significance of Muroto's geoheritage through the alliance with other GGN member geoparks. Muroto Geopark is not only a place to learn about the ongoing processes characteristic of a subduction zone, but is expecting large earthquakes and tsunamis that are predicted to occur. It can contribute to the geodiversity of GGN, and show the world how the area formed by tectonic actions sustains our community.

The second purpose is, by joining the GGN, to strengthen the networking among our community members, considering the affiliation with the GGN as one step in our ongoing progress. We are aware of the need to re-evaluate community resources, encourage networking among members and cooperate by sharing information. We aim to increase the local people's interest in the community, stimulate their curiosity and increase their sense of pride.

The third purpose is to make a positive influence on other areas with geoheritage. If Muroto City, with depopulation and declining industry, can conserve and utilize its geoheritage and achieve a sustainable development, it can encourage areas with similar problems elsewhere in the world.

3. Geoeducation as the first step of improvement

Muroto Geopark joined a national network in 2008, and gained endorsement to be a candidate for membership of the GGN in 2010. However, we failed to obtain the said endorsement twice in previous years. We attribute the failure to our inadequacy in promoting geotourism. Our areas needing improvement includes hub facilities, signage, community involvement and strategies to have tourists travel around and stay longer in Muroto.

In order to improve these issues, we have been focusing on education. We expect that education will realize children's potential to become great contributors to the sustainable development of the local economy. In the future, they are expected to support geopark-related activities as community members or researchers.

The 11th Children's Summer School on Earthquakes and Volcanoes held in Muroto in August 2010 truly influenced the way community members see the geopark. The participant children, who became "Muroto Geopark Kid Advisors" later, had a great learning experience with scientists. Community members also became highly interested in the geopark after this event, including schoolteachers who have been incorporating geopark themes in their teaching. Signage and pamphlets have been revised to reflect children's point of view.

4. Toward the future

As mentioned above, an educational event brought about a turning point, and Muroto Geopark began to attract increasing attention of the community. Moreover, growing number of community members want to gain accurate knowledge of the geopark

and communicate it to visitors. We, Muroto Geopark Promotion Committee intend to support the geopark activities run by community members through their own initiative. We expect that the effort will strengthen the collaboration with various industries including tourism, which will help us achieve our goals as a geopark.

Keywords: Muroto, Geopark, Global Geopark Networks