

Ambassador's Message no.47 (Reception for the 60th Anniversary of the Japan-Australia Commerce Agreement)

16 August 2017

Dear friends,

The Embassy of Japan in Australia on 8 August hosted a reception in celebration of the 60th Anniversary of Japan-Australia Commerce Agreement. The reception was held at my residence and was attended by more than 100 senior representatives of the public and private sectors, including: Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull; former Prime Ministers John Howard and Tony Abbott; Trade, Tourism and investment Minister Steven Ciobo; President of the Business Council of Australia (BCA), Mr Grant King; and President of the Federation of Japan Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Australia (FJCCI), Mr Masahiko Suenaga, among others. The reception provided an invaluable opportunity to reflect on how the Japan-Australia relationship has grown since the conclusion of the Commerce Agreement in 1957, and to consider ways in which the bilateral relationship might be strengthened even further in the years ahead.



Looking back on the reception, it was a tremendous honour to have the current Prime Minister of Australia and also two former Prime Ministers present on the evening. Each of the Prime Ministers addressed the audience and in doing so emphasised the importance of the 1957 Agreement as a historical turning point and the vast mutual benefit that has been generated by the trade and investment relationship it helped to foster. In particular, it was very stirring to witness Mr Turnbull, Mr Howard and Mr Abbott each express their

unequivocal support for the Japan-Australia relationship, as well as their desire to see the ties of our two nations continue to flourish and prosper into the future.

In terms of the reception's proceedings, the event commenced with a congratulatory message from Prime Minister Abe which I read to the audience. In his message, Prime Minister Abe said that the 1957 Commerce Agreement was concluded as a result of the "vision and firm resolve" of then Prime Ministers Menzies and Kishi. Prime Minister Abe also said that the Agreement made an "immense contribution to the economic growth of both Japan and Australia", while also strengthening the bilateral relationship in a "mutually beneficial way".



In my own speech, I noted that the attendance of so many high ranking representatives of government and the business community was a very clear demonstration of the immense value attached to the Japan-Australia relationship by both sides. I also commented that within 10 years of the conclusion of the Commerce Agreement, Japan became Australia's top trading partner in 1968—a position Japan maintained over the ensuing four decades, until 2008. I also touched on the benefits the Japan Australia Economic Partnership Agreement (JAEPA) has provided to exporters from both countries since coming into force in 2015 and in closing I stressed that in the current climate of international uncertainty, the Japan-Australia relationship is more important than ever, not just in economic terms, but in every aspect. ([My Speech is available here](#))

During his very warm address, Prime Minister Turnbull said that the 1957 Agreement was "very much ahead of its time" and affirmed that "neither Japan nor Australia would be the nations they are today without (the) rich and enduring relationship of the last 60 years".

Prime Minister Turnbull also commented that in his own travels to Japan, he had been “invigorated by the enthusiasm with which Japan embraces change, technology and innovation” as well as by “how optimistically Japan looks to the future”. Finally, Prime Minister Turnbull made a toast to the success of the Commerce Agreement and to the “strong and strengthening friendship between Australia and Japan”.

[\(Prime Minister Turnbull’s speech is available here\)](#)



Former Prime Minister Howard attended the reception as a special guest and delivered the commemorative address. In his speech, Mr Howard described the Japan-Australia Commerce Agreement as “the most far-sighted trade agreement that Australia has ever entered into” and said that following the conclusion of the Commerce Agreement, Japan became the “iron lung” of Australia’s export performance. Mr Howard concluded his very powerful speech by observing that it was a “lesson in life” that two countries that were once enemies “could put bitterness behind (them) and look to the future,” with the result being the development of a greatly beneficial relationship that he hoped would “continue in that state indefinitely”.



Former Prime Minister Abbott also delivered a very heartfelt speech, describing the relationship between Australia and Japan as not only an economic partnership and a security partnership, but also a “values partnership”. Specifically, Mr Abbott noted the two countries’ commitment to values including “democratic pluralism, freedom under the law” and support for “a rules-based international order”.

Minister Ciobo’s speech contrasted with those of the other speakers to some extent in that he focused predominantly on the ways in which Japan and Australia might build on the legacy of the Commerce Agreement moving forward. On a bilateral level, Minister Ciobo commented on the ongoing importance of Japanese investment in Australia, as well as the significant growth in the number of Japanese visitors travelling to Australia that has been observed in recent years. More broadly, Minister Ciobo noted that Japan and Australia were playing an increasingly important role in promoting international trade and investment on a regional level, as demonstrated by the close cooperation occurring between the two countries in relation to what might currently be described as the “TPP 11”.



A further highlight for the reception was a display containing the original Commerce Agreement and photographs taken during Prime Minister Kishi’s visit to Australia in 1957. The Agreement and the photos were arranged by the National Archives of Australia and were examined closely by many guests, including Prime Minister Turnbull and former Prime Ministers Howard and Abbott.



Group photograph of the speakers

This reception was undoubtedly one of the most important events the Embassy has hosted in many years and I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the speakers, attendees and all those who made this historic occasion such a resounding success.

Yours sincerely,

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Sumio Kusaka

Ambassador of Japan to Australia