

## 04 NEWS

# Japan's shipping focus on Darwin

## 'Gateway to Asia'

GARY SHIPWAY

THE hand of friendship between Japan, Australia and, in particular, Darwin has never been more important, Japan's Ambassador to Australia, Yamagami Shingo, says.

Mr Shingo, who wrapped up a four-day visit to Darwin yesterday, said political tensions in the South China Sea had put a sharp focus on Darwin as the shipping gateway to the region.

He also said the Territory's future as a source of rare earths would be beneficial for the NT.

"Darwin is important in three areas: history, business and security," Mr Shingo said.

"Inpex is not the only significant business relationship.

"We are looking at the possibility of promoting more co-operation in terms of Japan's import of rare earth minerals.

"Like Australia, we do not want to depend on one particular trading partner. This leads to vulnerability and in this regard Australia and Japan can do a lot to compare notes."

Mr Shingo said Japan's dependence on China as a source of rare earth minerals had topped at 90 per cent.

He said since political tensions had surfaced over island sovereignty, exports to Japan had virtually stopped. "So we are trying our best to reduce



Yamagami Shingo.

the dependency on China as a source of rare earth minerals. So Australia and the Northern Territory provide good potential for trade," he said.

Mr Shingo said it was a subject he raised with the NT government during his visit.

"There are a number of possibilities that need to be explored," he said.

"Darwin is important as Australia's gateway to Asia and much has been said about the importance of a free and open Pacific region.

"And Darwin is the connecting point to these vast oceans, so the strategic importance of Darwin could not be emphasised more.

"That is why Japanese self defence forces are participating in a number of joint exercises with their Australian counterparts in and around Darwin.

"We are all in the same boat when it comes to the rise of China when it comes to addressing opportunities and challenges this creates."