

## News from under the Southern Cross – Edition 9 Visit to Perth

1 April

From the 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, I undertook a visit to the city of Perth in the state of Western Australia. This was my first official visit to WA since taking up my ambassadorial position in Australia, and personally I was very much looking forward to my first ever visit to Perth. Perth, with its Mediterranean climate of blue skies and bathed in abundant sunshine, where the contrast between vegetation and water that one ordinarily sees within urban areas is rendered ever more vividly, is a truly beautiful city. I thus well understood why it is said that Perth is the best place to live not only in Australia, but in the world.

### (1) Exquisite timing and warm hospitality

Given that journeying to Western Australia remained difficult for such a long time as a result of the state border closures that have accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic, my visit presented the first opportunity in almost a year for a foreign ambassador residing in Canberra to visit WA, thus making me a trailblazer of sorts. This was actually pointed out to me by the Mayor of the City of Perth, Mr Basil Zempilas, and the Hon. Catherine Doust, President of the Legislative Council, who both received me very warmly. One particular memory from this visit was every time I went to sign the guestbook at one of my official destinations, I noticed that the date of the last entry was made a year ago.



With WA Premier McGowan



With Perth City Mayor Zempilas

Upon recommendation by acquaintances in Canberra, I was treated to an excellent lunch at the distinguished official residence of the Governor of Western Australia, the Hon. Kim Beazley AC (former leader of the Australian Labor Party, and former Australian ambassador to the United States). I was able to have a very honest and frank exchange of views with Governor Beazley on the current state of global and regional affairs.



At a lunch meeting hosted by WA Governor the Hon. Kim Beazley AC

From my old acquaintance the Hon. Richard Court AC, former Australian ambassador to Japan (and former Premier of WA) and Mrs Court, I received a lesson on Australian history while admiring the personal art collection of a well-known local magnate and was able to discuss everything under heaven with other guests over dinner. It was truly an unforgettable evening.



Dinner hosted by former Australian ambassador to Japan Richard Court AC (on the far right)

## **(2) Exchanging opinions about current issues**

My visit to Perth enabled me to engage in vigorous conversations with Governor Beazley, Premier McGowan, Legislative President Doust, Mayor Zempilas, business leaders, scholars, Japanese corporate representatives and Japan-Australia friendship groups and enjoy a wide-ranging exchange of opinions with them. Given the extraordinarily high level of dependence that WA has on trade with China and the recent experience of WA products being subject to import restriction measures, most notably for wine and lobster, much attention was paid to responses to federal government policies.

Developments such as the fact that the mainstay of the WA state economy, the iron ore trade, had not yet been subject to import restrictions, statements made by high-level US officials showing support for Australia's position, and with the visit coming straight after the robust exchange between the US and China in Alaska, also meant that I didn't hear much talk about conciliation.

## **(3) Spreading the word about Japan's position**

One of the principle reasons for my visit to WA was an invitation that I received from my good friend and Perth USAsia Centre Director Gordon Flake to attend the annual 'Japan Symposium' hosted by the same USAsia Centre think tank. As you would no doubt be aware, former foreign minister Julie Bishop has played a highly prominent role in the 2+2 meetings held between Australia and Japan. With her usual impeccable style former minister Bishop gave a powerful, forthright address, and certainly lit up the venue.

I myself took the stage along with former foreign minister Bishop to give my speech ([please refer here to a copy of the speech text](#)). Thereafter we were joined by former ambassador Court and Director Flake where we engaged in a four-person panel discussion.

[\(Footage of the symposium can be seen here\)](#).



At the Japan Symposium

In addition to discussing Perth's role as Australia's gateway to the Indian Ocean region, I was particularly struck by the fact that since the symposium came not long after the Quad Leaders' Summit, a majority of the discussion centered on the Quad. The fact that the very first question from the audience came courtesy of my good friend Glen Fukushima, who was participating in the symposium via an internet link from Washington, also made the venue acutely aware just how close the relationships are between Australia, Japan and the US.

#### **(4) The power of wealth**

In addition to the above, I received briefings from corporate representatives of Australia's premier energy and iron ore companies such as Woodside, itself involved in the natural gas industry, as well as Rio Tinto, BHP, and FMG, with whom I engaged in frank conversations.

The Australian corporate representatives made it clear that they were very interested in transcending the more traditional supply-based Japan-Australia trade centered on iron ore and natural gas and opening up new areas for development, such as hydrogen.

You would certainly be aware of the role that Western Australian iron ore and natural gas have played in supporting the Japanese economy. At the same time, when one sees the power of the abundant wealth brought about by natural resources reflected in the streets of Perth, in the soaring head offices of major corporations that are second to none of the office buildings found in Tokyo and the art collections of individual entrepreneurs, it takes your breath away.

When I saw the sign for the Inpex Corporation, which is responsible for administering the US\$4 billion mega Ichthys LNG project, from the street in Perth's business district, I admit to having felt an enormous sense of pride.

In the midst of the response to issues involving climate change and a reality that will see carbon emissions reduced to zero by 2050, I have great expectations for the creation of a 'plan for the future' brimming with ambition. By combining the vitality of Australian corporations, with their intention to develop industries that transcend the ages, with the world-renowned technical and capital strengths of Japanese corporations, who's to say that this will not result in even closer economic ties between Japan and Australia?



The Inpex sign amid high-rise

And so, here's to the ever-beautiful city of Perth.

I thus made my way back to Canberra, all the while thinking that I will visit you again as often as I can.

YAMAGAMI Shingo