

## **News from Under the Southern Cross – Edition 11**

### **Tenth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake**

Last week was a big one for the Embassy of Japan. That's because we invited around 200 Australians to attend our reception marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake. We held this reception on April 15 rather than March 11, the actual date of the disaster, as we wanted to personally thank as many of the Australians who have supported the region as possible and show them just how far recovery in the Tohoku region has progressed.

#### **(1) Former PM Julia Gillard's thoughtfulness**

Ten years have passed since the day that is remembered so vividly by the Japanese. Japan was very fortunate to receive support from all over the world following the disaster, such as the U.S. Armed Forces' Operation Tomodachi. Amongst all the offers of assistance, the one who arrived first in the Tohoku region following the disaster was then- Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard.



Julia Gillard visiting Minami-Sanriku in April



Video message from former Australian prime minister Julia Gillard

I approached former prime minister Julia Gillard and invited her to attend the reception, but she was unfortunately unable to attend as she was overseas at the time. However, Ms Gillard more than willingly provided a video message. In her message, Ms Gillard emphasised the stoicism and resilience she saw in the survivors while recalling how different it was hearing the news of the disaster and seeing the devastation in person. Her heart-warming message left a strong impression on everyone in attendance (You can view Ms Gillard's message [here](#)).

## **(2) Astonishingly swift support from Australia**

Australia's support was not limited to Ms Gillard's visit to the Tohoku region. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of March, less than three days after the disaster struck, an urban search and rescue team from Australia arrived at Yokota Air Base in Tokyo on Royal Australian Air Force C-17 heavy transport aircraft. On-board were personnel from the Australian Defence Force and NSW Police, Fire and Ambulance Service together with ACT fire fighters and search and rescue dog handlers from Queensland.

A 76-member Urban Search and Rescue Team together with staff from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Australian Embassy in Tokyo were quickly dispatched to Minami-Sanriku. RAAF C-17 heavy transport aircraft transported food, water and personnel around Japan. These aircraft also brought specialised equipment from Australia to help bring the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station under control. Out of the four RAAF C-17 transport aircraft, Australia kindly dispatched three of them to Japan.



Search and rescue taskforce comprising of police, ambulance and fire & rescue personnel

So this is why we held this reception; to invite these brave Australian men and women and convey our deepest appreciation for their support. Also in attendance was Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin AC (Retd) and former Australian ambassador to Japan, Mr Murray McLean AO. Air Chief Marshal Binskin – who was Chief of Air Force at that time and later became Chief of the Australian Defence Force – decided almost immediately to dispatch Australia’s RAAF C-17 heavy transport aircraft to Japan while Mr McLean lead coordination efforts in Japan. In their respective speeches, both gentlemen shared their invaluable experiences with the disaster. General IWASAKI Shigeru AO (Retd) – who was Chief of Staff, Japan Air Self Defence Force at that time and later became Chief of Staff, Joint Staff, the Japanese Self Defense Forces – also shared a message via video from Tokyo. As if we were in that exact moment, General IWASAKI vividly recalled working with his friend, Air Chief Marshal Binskin hours after the disaster struck when Australia promptly decided to assist Japan.



Former Chief of the Australian Defence Force,  
Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin AC (Retd)



Former Australian Ambassador to Japan,  
Mr Murray McLean AO



Video message from former Chief of the Staff, Joint Staff, the Japan Self-  
Defense Forces, General IWASAKI Shigeru AO (Retd)



### (3) Tohoku Youth Program

The warm hand extended by Australia wasn't only just in terms of emergency support. The Tohoku Youth Program, an initiative to invite young Japanese who lost a parent or both in the disaster to Canberra for a short respite and educational experience, is also thanks to Australia. The Canberra families who kindly hosted these young participants from Tohoku were also invited to the reception.



Tohoku Youth Program host families and representatives, including Mr Barry Jarman (second from right)

At the reception, two former Japanese participants of the program shared their messages of appreciation. While one of them stated in a matter-of-fact way that he has no memory of the first couple of years following the disaster and losing a parent, they both kindly thanked Australia and their host families for everything they have done for them. I could see so many of the guests moved to tears. As I took to the podium following their messages to express my gratitude to Australia, I too could not help my eyes welling up. Feeling overwhelmed, I found myself repeating the following line twice in my speech. “We will never forget what Australia has done for Japan” (You can read my speech [here](#)).



#### (4) Hang on, Tohoku!

A number of photos were on display at the reception showing how far reconstruction efforts have come in the Tohoku region. And to appeal to our guests, food and drink produced in the Tohoku region were also available for them to enjoy. The popular Sasakama fish cake dish from Minami-Sanriku, the yaki-onigiri flavoured with Sendai miso and the udon noodles with kombu and wakame from the Sanriku coast went like hot cakes!



Sasakama fish cake dish from Minami-Sanriku



The yaki-onigiri flavoured with Sendai miso

And guests lined up for sake produced by breweries in Fukushima, Miyagi, Iwate and Ibaraki prefectures. I was very impressed to see how happy guests were when told they can purchase these sake brands right here in Canberra.\*

\* We served Daishichi from Fukushima Prefecture, Uragasumi from Miyagi Prefecture and Nanbu-Bijin from Iwate Prefecture which can be purchased at Dickson Liquor Store, and Ippin from Ibaraki Prefecture which can be purchased at Plonk Beer & Wine store in Fyshwick.

What pleased me the most about this reception was that the majority of our guests had not had the opportunity to visit my official residence before. They weren't like my regular guests like politicians, government officials or other ambassadors. They were the defence personnel, fire fighters and search rescue teams who were right there on the ground in the disaster-stricken areas of Tohoku days after the earthquake struck. Many wore their uniforms, and host families brought along their children.

I am incredibly happy to have had this reception to thank Australia for the support, hear the stories of those connected to this disaster, and give the opportunity to those who usually wouldn't have a chance to visit the Embassy and enjoy Japanese cuisine.



Royal Australian Air Force and Australian Army Personnel



ACT Fire & Rescue



Ambulance NSW

### **(5) Unforgettable memories**

After the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station incident, many countries concerned about radioactive contamination stopped importing or banned products from the disaster-stricken areas, starting with seafood. Some of Japan's neighbouring countries introduced import bans, which were unreasonable and not based on scientific facts. As such, the Japanese government took this ban to the World Trade Organisation as it was inconsistent with WTO rules. However, despite the Panel fully recognising Japan's claims, the Appellate Body of the WTO did not go far enough to confirm this ruling based on alleged insufficiency of the Panel's legal analysis. As a result, the bans put in place by Japan's neighbours were not overturned and a judgement was not made as per their WTO consistency.



If this matter cannot be resolved when taken to the WTO, we recognise that a solution must be achieved through diplomatic means. Across all levels of government, from prime ministerial, ministerial, and ambassadorial to even a department level, Japan has fiercely urged these countries to remove their import bans. When I was the Assistant Minister/Director-General of the Economic Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I invited the ambassadors of those countries with import bans in Japan one by one to my office to reason with them together with officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. Fortunately, countries in Europe, the Middle East and South East Asia have since eased or completely removed their import restrictions. Regrettably, however, a small number of Japan's neighbours still have import bans in place.

#### **(6) Recovery efforts continue**

I am very thankful that Australia is not adopting such import bans on Japanese products. Perhaps this says a lot about the maturity of mutual understanding and trust between our two nations as well as the assistance provided by Australia to Japan at the time of the disaster and the continued support ever since. So that Australia has a full understanding of the release of ALPS treated water from the Fukushima Daiichi site, we are thoroughly briefing the Australian government.

Even though I spend my days away from Japan admiring the Southern Cross in the Aussie sky, the tragic events of March 11 and the pain and suffering it caused to the people of Tohoku are always in my thoughts. When I listened to the pianist play '*Hana wa saku*' (Flowers Will Bloom) at the reception, I reaffirmed my feelings of immense gratitude for the warm support and cooperation from Australia. And while wishing for the continued success of Tohoku's recovery, I will endeavour to continue working hard in my position as Ambassador of Japan to Australia.

YAMAGAMI Shingo

