

# Speech

Presented by HE Mr YAMAGAMI Shingo, Ambassador of Japan to Australia

On the occasion of the *Sharing Your Experience of Japan Reception*

Ambassador's Official Residence, Canberra

5 November 2021

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's lovely to see so many faces here.

Now that the lockdown has ended, we can finally take off our masks and socialize face to face.

For Japan of course masks were already a part of everyday life.

So in a way it was nice to see our countries grow closer with regards to embracing facial wear.

Now if only I could get the Australian government to implement a moist towel for every customer rule, I'd feel even more at home.

That was just a little joke.

I could tell you another COVID joke now.

But you'll have to wait two weeks to see if you get it.

Don't worry, I didn't gather you here to regale you with the bad jokes I spent lockdown thinking up.

Today's reception is being held to showcase the strong Australia-Japan ties created through direct people-to-people exchange.

In other words, it is an occasion to celebrate you, the people who build up our bilateral relationship.

Thanks to you, that relationship has never been better than it is today.

Each and every one of you is a great asset to Japan.

That said- there is no such thing as a free meal.

I've brought you here today because I have something to ask of you.

I'd like you to continue to strengthen these essential ties.

Each of your unique skills can contribute to the future Australia-Japan relationship.

As the bridges that connect our two nations, I have great hopes for what you can achieve.

Many of you would have formed your first cultural connection with Japan through the JET Programme, or the MEXT scholarship.

I'm glad you came back to Australia to be a bridge, even if it means you are missing out on advanced toilets and relaxing hot springs.

Over the years, the JET programme has enabled almost five-thousand Aussies to work, and the MEXT scholarship a further seven-hundred to study, in Japan.

Many JET and MEXT alumni have gone on to have brilliant careers defined by incredible achievements for our ties.

Some have represented Australia as high-level diplomats.

Others have fostered creativity, open debate and innovation through careers in academia.

Some became leaders in the corporate world.

Most recently, some alumni even worked on the organization of the Tokyo Games.

And some work right here at our Embassy.

Australia is one of one-hundred-and-sixty countries participating in the MEXT scholarship and fifty-seven participating in JET.

Today I am also honored to welcome diplomats from other key participating nations; the United States and Canada.

Thank you for coming- but please kindly put your hands over your ears for this next bit.

Because I'd like to ask the Aussies present to continue promoting JET to their friends and family.

I was told by a top official at CLAIR that Aussie JETs always prove to be a reliable, intelligent bunch.

If you manage to out-do the other nations in terms of numbers, we may find that the standard English in Japan is Aussie.

I dream of the day when Japanese high school kids are calling McDonalds 'Maccas' and the service station 'servo'.

Had my English teachers been Australian, it certainly would have prepared me better for my career here.

And I wouldn't have wasted so much time trying to find woop-woop on a map.

I would also like to welcome all the Japanese language teachers in attendance. I am always extremely proud to note that Australia has the largest number of learners of Japanese per capita in the world.

It is thanks to you that language-learning, one of the most fundamental tools for strengthening our ties into the future, thrives.

Also in attendance today are members of the Cowra council and Cowra Japanese Garden & Cultural Centre, the Australia-Japan Society and the Canberra Nara Sister City Committee.

I am delighted to announce that Chair of the Canberra Nara Sister City Committee, Mrs Narelle Hargreaves, has been recognized for her contribution to enhancing interregional exchange.

She will be awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays.

Congratulations Narelle.

She is in good company, because so too will Dame Olivia Newton-John, of whom I am one of many, many Japanese fans.

When I was young, memorizing her songs helped to improve my English.

Unfortunately, my Karaoke rendition of 'Zanadu' is still 'Zana-du-readful'

Today, we have a video message from Olivia to play to you at the conclusion of my speech.

Six years ago she traveled to Fukushima to perform a special concert to provide relief to the survivors of the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami.

Music, like language, is a powerful communication tool, able to transcend cultural barriers.

I would like to use this occasion to pay tribute to all who provided support to Japan in the wake of the 2011 disaster, by playing a song of hope and remembrance following Olivia's message.

The multilingual version of this song, produced this year for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, is particularly touching.

For now, please raise a glass in celebration of the wonderful Australia-Japan relationship to which each of you has, and will continue, to contribute.

Kanpai

乾杯！

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