

## News From Under the Southern Cross – Edition 44 Support for Japanese Corporations

3 December

Previously, in Edition 16 of my newsletter titled “Principal Commercial Officer” I explained the role of the Ambassador in strengthening economic ties between Japan and Australia. On that note, two major events related to this topic took place last week. It was truly an important week.



With the Minister for Trade, Dan Tehan, and Japanese business representatives

### 1. The General Meeting of The Federation of Japan Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Australia (FJCCI)

The first event was a gathering of FJCCI executives from across Australia on November 16<sup>th</sup> in Canberra in order to conduct the annual plenary meeting. There are around 330 Japanese businesses making inroads into the Australian market, and chambers of commerce have been set up in five hubs across the country, namely Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane, and the Gold Coast.

Every November, executives from the chambers of commerce assemble at the Ambassador’s Residence. It is an occasion for the Embassy to learn from them about the activities of respective chambers of commerce during the past year, as well as to listen to their requests and expectations from the Embassy and the Consulates-General.

This year, because of travel restrictions as a result of the COVID pandemic, we were unable to have representatives from Perth, Brisbane, and the Gold Coast join us in person. Their activities and views were presented at the gathering by one of the attendees, or via video recordings. Yet

20 representatives were able to attend from Sydney and Melbourne. I am glad to report to you that the meeting became a precious 'reunion' opportunity for the participants after the lifting of the lockdown, and that lively discussions took place.

2. Requests for the establishment of a "travel bubble"

I received a great variety of requests from the business representatives. Of these but the most fervently requested issue was the establishment of a "travel bubble" between Australia and Japan which could enable people to travel without restriction between the two countries just like in pre-pandemic days.

Given that Australia has already gone ahead with free travel arrangements with New Zealand and Singapore, expectations are high for Japan to be next in line. In fact, the flow of people between Japan and Australia has been hampered in many ways, because of restrictions in relation to the COVID pandemic, in terms of (1) the temporary return to Japan, and re-entry into Australia, of Japanese staff and their families, (2) the entry of Japanese business people to Australia for new assignments and business trips, and (3) the entry of Australian business people to Japan for new assignments and business trips. This is a serious problem. The free travel of people is essential for swift and smooth economic recovery post-pandemic.

3. Trade Minister Tehan's uplifting head-up ushers in the big news of the following week

On November 15<sup>th</sup>, on the eve of the annual general meeting of the chambers of commerce, I organized a dinner at my Residence for the participants. There Trade Minister Dan Tehan gave a speech on the current state and future prospects for economic relations between Australia and Japan, and then stayed for an extended and lively exchange of views with the Japanese attendees. The occasion could not have been more timely, given that Minister Tehan is an influential member of the Cabinet, overseeing trade and tourism.

What made me particularly happy was the strong declaration by Minister Tehan that he would "like to have (a Japan-Australia travel bubble) in place before Christmas". This statement got the Japanese audience clearly excited, and was met by a round of enthusiastic applause.



Trade Minister Tehan giving his presentation

And in no time after this exchange, on November 22<sup>nd</sup> of the following week I received the fantastic news of the Australian Federal Government's decision to relax most of the restrictions on travel from Japan to Australia. Not only will those restrictions be eased from December 1<sup>st</sup>, Australia's measures vis-à-vis Japan are unilateral, that is, without any proviso for a mutual relaxation in restrictions, as in the arrangements with New Zealand and Singapore. This decision by the Morrison government sends a strong message of the importance that Australia places in the relationship based on trust that it has built with Japan. The Embassy will do its utmost to reciprocate this trust and will work on the relaxing of the remaining restrictions on the Japanese side.

#### 4. The Japan-Australia Infrastructure Networking Meeting

Another major event that took place last week was the Japan-Australia Infrastructure Networking Meeting. The Embassy of Japan serves as the host of this event, which presents an opportunity for us to act as a bridge between Japanese and Australian businesses and the Australian government.

The meeting proved to be a great success, thanks to the support and cooperation of the Australia Japan Business Co-operation Committee (AJBCC), KPMG Australia, and PwC Australia.



More than 100 people participated in person



Updating the participants on Western Sydney

A current topic of great interest to Japanese businesses is the development of Western Sydney. We therefore narrowed down the focus of the meeting to this development project and invited relevant Japanese corporations, NSW authorities involved in the development, and Australian businesses. Thus we prepared a venue and an opportunity for these stakeholders to make the most of the whole day on November 19<sup>th</sup> to exchange views and ideas as well as to engage in networking.



Networking between Japan-Australia stakeholders

During the Q & A, businesses aired their frank opinions

##### 5. Timely, yet challenges remain...

I received praise and words of appreciation from a great many business representatives attending the meeting, to the effect that our initiative was extremely timely, allowing them to have face-to-face discussions with business partners and local authorities for the first time in a long time.

At the same time, it became clear there is no room for complacency about future developments. On the one hand, you have Japanese companies who demand highly detailed information when it comes to bids and actual investments. On the other hand, you have the NSW authorities who prefer to leave the details to subsequent conversations with the bidders. I keenly felt that continued efforts determination is absolutely essential to narrow such “information gaps” and “perception gaps” between Japanese businesses and Australian authorities. There is also a pressing need to ensure that head offices of these corporations in Japan understand the situation on the ground.

The Western Sydney development is an important project, on which the future development of the economic relationship between Japan and Australia as well as the role played by Japanese corporations in the Indo-Pacific region depend. The Embassy is determined to do our utmost, working closely with the Consulate-General in Sydney as well as with relevant government ministries in Kasumigaseki (the Japanese central government).

6. A meeting with NSW Premier Perrottet

On that note, I should report that I had the chance to meet with Premier Dominic Perrottet, the new Premier of NSW, on November 19<sup>th</sup>.



Although he was busy, having just taken up his position, he was so kind and welcoming. He told me that he once spent just over 3 weeks in Japan holidaying with his family. We discussed those opportunities and challenges in strengthening the economic relationship between Japan and NSW, including the Western Sydney development, the installation of high-speed rail, as well as hydrogen production and export, and I am glad that we had a meeting of minds!

I sincerely hope that Premier Perrottet will visit Japan at some point next year, leading to the further development of our relationship. I will also continue to strive to do my best as the “Principle Commercial Officer”.

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