

Speech

Presented by H.E. Mr YAMAGAMI Shingo
Ambassador of Japan to Australia
On the occasion of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan's Birthday Reception
Monday 14 February 2022
Ambassador's Official Residence, Canberra

1. Acknowledgements

The Hon Tony Smith MP, former Speaker of the House of Representatives

The Hon Tony Abbott AC, former Prime Minister of Australia

The Hon Dan Tehan MP, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment

The Hon Sussan Ley MP, Minister for the Environment

Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck, Minister for Sport

Senator James Paterson, Chair of Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security

Current and former members of the Australia/Japan Parliamentary Group, including Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP, the Hon Warren Entsch MP, Senator Catryna Bilyk, and Senator the Hon Don Farrell

Mr Andrew Shearer, Director-General of National Intelligence

Vice Admiral David Johnston AO, RAN, Vice Chief of the Defence Force

Vice Admiral Michael Noonan AO, RAN, Chief of Navy

Lieutenant General Rick Burr AO, DSC, MVO, Chief of Army

Air Marshal Mel Hupfeld AO, DSC, Chief of Air Force

Ambassadors and High Commissioners, including honourable members of Bikers

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

2. Introduction

It is my absolute pleasure to welcome you all to my residence to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan.

I extend my warm welcome to the magpies in this garden.

Although we are celebrating his birthday a week early, His Majesty will turn 62 on February 23, still young by Japanese standards!

In fact, the average life expectancy for women in Japan is 87.7 and 81.6 for men, so women are much stronger in Japan!

At the tender age of fourteen, His Majesty came to Australia on his first overseas trip and spent five days living just like an ordinary Aussie kid, enjoying the beach and riding bikes with his mates.

Thank you all for coming on an important day of the year: Valentine's Day!

My wife, Kaoru told me she hoped I had something special planned for today.

But she certainly was not expecting this!

3. Japan and Australia over the past 12 months

It has been a little over a year since my arrival and what a year it has been!

Despite lockdowns and border restrictions, I could visit every state and territory – even Western Australia!

And some states and territories more than once.

I am away so often my staff have forgotten what I look like!

One important lesson from lockdowns is under no circumstances should you cut your own hair!

Ask someone with a steady hand to do it - something I should have stressed to some of my staff!

Jokes aside, we are witnessing Japan and Australia's strong and robust ties continue to expand and deepen.

I often say the sky is the limit, but why on Earth stop there!

Let me take this opportunity to look back on some of the impressive strides our two countries have taken together over the past year.

4. Japan-Australia Leaders' Meeting and RAA

And so now is the time to reveal a secret.

My priority over the past year has been the finalisation of the Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement.

It is the next step in the 'Special Strategic Partnership' and opens a new chapter for elevated security and defence cooperation.

This agreement constitutes Japan's first ever RAA and is an epoch-making breakthrough for Japan and Australia.

It has meant the UK and France are left waiting in the queue, but no worries, Vicki. You will be next!

Last month, Prime Minister Morrison conducted the virtual meeting with Prime Minister KISHIDA in a secure room inside Parliament House.

Now, I have another secret to reveal to you. But before I do, let me reassure you that I can keep a secret!

I was lucky to join this meeting as a member of Team Australia.

And from that very small room, you could not escape just how enormously significant this step was in Japan-Australia relations.

5. Quad meetings

Looking ahead it is clear that Japan and Australia's relationship will continue to grow in size and scope.

Prime Minister KISHIDA intends to host the second in-person summit of the Quad in the first half of this year.

And only days ago, Foreign Minister HAYASHI attended the foreign ministerial meeting of the Quad in Melbourne.

6. Support for Tonga

Support for Tonga is another example of our bilateral cooperation.

As part of the international response, Japan deployed four transport aircraft to move essential humanitarian assistance supplies from Japan to Tonga via RAAF base Amberley near Brisbane.

7. Hydrogen

On Hydrogen, I attended a ceremony in Victoria just weeks ago to celebrate the arrival of the *Suisei Frontier*, the world's first liquid hydrogen carrier.

And its arrival certainly made a splash in the news.

The world-first Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project puts Japan and Australia at the cutting edge of creating new technology and cleaner energy.

This is our answer to achieve emissions reductions.

Over there at the gate, you would have seen the Toyota Mirai – one of the first Japanese vehicles powered by hydrogen.

Going from zero to a hundred in 9 seconds, be careful not to drink and drive. You might just spill your drink!

8. Space

Together with hydrogen, new areas of cooperation are opening up at an exponential rate.

Space has increasingly become an area of importance.

Optus just announced Mitsubishi Electric will manufacture Australia's next generation of defence

satellites as part of their tender to deliver the ADF's future satellites.

I keep my fingers crossed they will further build on the success of the Optus C1 satellite.

I would have gone into detail about the satellite, but I am afraid it went way over my head.

And as the role of space in national security grows more important, it is only natural for our two countries to take on new heights as 'Special Strategic Partners'.

9. Infrastructure

Last year, we hosted the Japan-Australia Infrastructure Meeting in Sydney.

This is our opportunity to be a bridge or even a matchmaker between Japanese heavy hitters and Australian businesses and governments.

Many robust discussions were held with great interest shown in the development of Western Sydney by Japanese businesses.

Japan's bullet train was also a hot topic. I have a dream that one day I will see high-speed rail running on the red, Aussie earth.

When that time comes, I will be able to welcome more guests from right across the eastern seaboard to this reception where they can drink like a fish and be home by bedtime!

10. Julia Gillard and Olivia Newton-John

Just over a week ago, I presented former prime minister Julia Gillard with one of Japan's highest honours, the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun for her contributions to our bilateral relationship.

Most notably, for her actions following the devastating 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

In this election year, I can assure you this decoration is awarded irrespective of political affiliation.

As a recipient, Julia Gillard is in great company as she joins former prime ministers Bob Hawke and John Howard.

Australian film and music legend Dame Olivia Newton-John will also be awarded for her contributions to our cordial relations and her influence on Japanese pop music.

I am *hopelessly devoted* to present the decoration to Dame Olivia in person here at my residence sometime this year.

I was lucky enough to speak to Dame Olivia on the phone and I tell you *I got chills! They're multiplying!*

11. Sport

Finally, it has been a tremendous year for sports.

The achievement of holding the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games was made possible only with close cooperation from Australia and many other friends.

Even now, the memories are still so fresh.

The arrival of the Aussie Spirit was a watershed moment.

As the first foreign team to arrive, they dramatically turned around public opinion.

Japan and Australia repeatedly prove they are fierce yet friendly sporting nations.

I had the opportunity to see OSAKA Naomi's return to the Australian Open.

I was betting on a clash between Naomi and Ash Barty, but there will be a next time and I will be in the front row.

My faith was restored when KUNIEDA Shingo – what a great first name by the way! – Shingo secured his 11th men's wheelchair singles title.

The Samurai Blue will face-off the Socceroos in the World Cup Qualifiers on March 24 in Sydney.

This is an important match for both teams, and I hope to see them make it through to the World Cup.

12. Tonight's reception

Tonight, I encourage you to enjoy all that is on offer this evening – from the food and drink to the

displays by Japanese companies and organisations as well as the demonstrations of tea ceremony and flower arrangement.

I would like to draw your attention to the special strawberries and Hida beef from Gifu Prefecture in central Japan.

Indeed, they are precious delicacies, so please excuse my staff if they gaze longingly at your plate.

13. Conclusion

Like so many diplomats, perhaps I have spoken for too long, so I would like to end my speech with this.

Each one of you here – in one way or another – has played an important role in advancing Japan-Australia relations.

I ask you to continue joining me on this journey in propelling relations even further in 2022.

Because we all know, the sky is not the limit.

Thank you very much.