

**H.E Ambassador YAMAGAMI's Address to the
Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory
17 February 2022**

1. Introduction and Acknowledgements

The Honourable Michael Gunner MLA, Chief Minister of the Northern Territory,

Mrs Lia Finocchiaro MLA, Leader of the Opposition,

The Hon. Ngaree Ah Kit MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly,

Honourable Members, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you, Madame Speaker, for that kind introduction.

It is indeed an honour to be able to address you today, the first Ambassador of Japan to be afforded this honour, on the subject of Japan's relations with the Northern Territory, and what this holds both for the Territory and for Australia as a whole.

I should start off by saying that it is great to be back in the Northern Territory and Darwin in particular. This marks my third trip to your wonderful city.

The Northern Territory was one of my first destinations for an official visit after arriving in Australia to take up my post, and even now I'm stunned by the sheer size of the Northern Territory and all of its abundant attractions - including Crocosaurus Cove.

I won't be cage diving with any crocodiles during this visit, but having worked with federal politicians in numerous countries, perhaps I can claim to have already taken enough risks!

The Northern Territory contains so many unique natural wonders that it is no surprise that, back in 2019, Japanese tourists made up the largest contingent of foreign tourists to visit Uluru.

While there may be those who might occasionally confuse Austria with Australia, when it comes to Uluru, everyone in Japan knows where that is.

Such is its popularity that a well-known film in Japan made it the centre of the world.

It's a reflection of the affinity that the people of Japan have for nature in all its forms, which is something quite unique among tourists from Asia.

During my time in Australia, I have met Australians from all walks of life and persuasions.

A number of Australians are quite humble, and say that this is still a young country whose influence is yet to be felt and whose history has yet to be written. Yet we all know that this is not true.

Australia has an indigenous history of 65,000 years, the oldest continuous living culture in the world, one that far outstrips the nations of Asia and their claims of historical longevity.

It is a unique culture of great beauty, as I acknowledge by wearing this bracelet.

It was given to me as a gift by an Aboriginal artist in the Riverland region during my visit there.

Meticulously made of beads in the design of the Japanese flag – what a great gift. What kind consideration.

My first visit to Darwin actually took place back in 2018, when I accompanied then Prime Minister ABE Shinzo on his historic visit to this capital of the north.

This marked the first ever visit by a Japanese prime minister to Darwin, and was a visit imbued with great significance.

Prime Minister Morrison made mention of this in his comments at the time when he said “We acknowledge our history and we commemorate our sacrifice and loss today, but importantly, we have further strengthened our great relationship as good friends and great partners”.

This sentiment was also reflected in comments made about our bilateral relationship by former Prime Minister Julia Gillard, who said “We have

achieved great things together that once would have seemed unimaginable. We achieved them because we sought the best in each other, transcending the barriers of distance, culture and history to create something truly remarkable”.

These words and their sentiment ring as true today as when they were said.

I had the honour two weeks ago to host a dinner for Ms Gillard on the occasion of her receiving the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun at my residence in Canberra. She was such a charming, delightful guest, and a great friend of Japan.

One of the duties that I shall perform while I am in the Top End will be to accompany members of the Legislative Assembly, at the invitation of the Northern Territory Heritage Council, to the dedication ceremony for a memorial plaque to the crew of the I-124.

The plaque is not only there to remember the sinking of the submarine, but also to recognise each individual crew member and the sacrifice that they and other members of previous generations made in service to their nation.

This serves as a vivid reminder that the close modern relationship shared between Japan and Australia has been built upon the sacrifices and commitment of past generations of both countries.

I am sure that you are all aware of the story of FUJITA Ryugo and his salvage work in Darwin Harbour.

It is examples like these and countless others made during the post-war era which created the foundations of trust and friendship that now support and strengthen our bilateral ties.

We have indeed come a long way together over the past seven decades, but in many ways we are just getting started. The potential in our bilateral relationship is enormous, with so much room to expand and grow.

So while recognising what has come before us, we can now turn to the future and consider what to do next. With ambition, there's nothing that we can't achieve together.

2. Overall View of Japan-Australia Relations

(1) The Quad

This dynamism is already producing results, first and foremost in the field of security cooperation.

As you may be aware, Melbourne last week played host to a meeting of the foreign ministers of the Quad.

In the first half of this year, Japan will be hosting the Quad Summit Meeting.

Japan and Australia, together with our like-minded partners the United States and India, are at the forefront of taking practical, constructive measures to realise our shared vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

We are already co-operating across a myriad of different fields to make this vision a reality, be it by vaccine distribution, by tackling climate change, promoting energy cooperation, securing vital technologies, infrastructure building, and venturing into outer space.

The closeness of our evolving security partnership was on full display at the beginning of this year for the Japan-Australia Virtual Summit.

While this was originally going to take place in person, the omicron situation forced it to shift online.

As the Ambassador of Japan, I had the privilege of joining Prime Minister Scott Morrison in a secure room within Parliament House with other members of the Australian delegation as they conducted the meeting.

This was a unique, and possibly unprecedented, example of Australia and Japan working together, as I became a member of Team Australia for the duration of the meeting.

The meeting itself witnessed the historic signing of the long anticipated Reciprocal Access Agreement (or RAA) between Japan and Australia.

What does this mean in practical terms? It means that the skies of the

Northern Territory and the seas off its coast will see a lot more visits by Japan's Self Defense Forces in the coming years.

SDF personnel will also become a more familiar presence in the Top End, dropping by Mitchell Street for a bit of R 'n R from time to time.

The old image of the Japanese as shy and demure will certainly need an update!

And it won't just be the US Marines that will have to keep an eye out for the odd rogue croc, snake or shark!

I expect that the SDF will become a lot more familiar with all of the NT's residents in the years ahead, even if it means carefully checking their boots in the morning to avoid any surprise visitors!

(2) Security Relations

The truth is it is plainly evident to anyone who happens to look at a map that the Northern Territory and Darwin are a strategic lynchpin and vital to the security of the Indo-Pacific.

A stable Indo-Pacific is paramount in order to ensure peace in our region, which is why Japan has welcomed initiatives like AUKUS and why it works closely with Australia to contribute to regional stability.

This is where the Top End plays such an important role in this process.

It is the Northern Territory that has helped Japan to develop its interoperability with the ADF through events such as Exercise Talisman Sabre, Exercise Pitch Black, Exercise Southern Jackaroo, and Exercise Kakadu.

We've done more joint training in the Northern Territory than elsewhere in Australia, and so it is only natural that the Northern Territory will continue to be a key platform for the promotion of the Japan-Australia security relationship.

(3) Economic Relations

This relationship continues to be supported by the long-standing, robust economic ties shared between Japan and the Northern Territory.

The most symbolic example of this, and one that literally dominates an entire bank of Bladin Point at Darwin Harbour, is the Inpex LNG Project.

It represents Japan's largest ever investment in LNG abroad, a leviathan project between Japan and Australia.

While there were no shortages of potential sites for the project across Australia, Inpex clearly saw the advantages in placing its facilities in the Northern Territory.

Through far-sighted negotiations with the Northern Territory government, Inpex made its decision and ever since both sides have reaped the benefits.

(Inpex contributions to NT) The LNG project has contributed \$10 billion to the NT economy since its inception.

In 2020, Inpex invested \$2 million in social programs across the NT, and has invested \$9 million in education and training facilities, including scholarships for Territorian students at Charles Darwin University.

As the global community moves towards more actively tackling climate change, Inpex has chosen to move with the times and is currently exploring the potential for its Northern Territory facilities to supply hydrogen to Japan.

This resembles the hydrogen exports recently made from Victoria aboard transport ship the Suiso (or Hydrogen) Frontier, as has been mentioned.

Inpex experts in hydrogen conversion technology are on the ground in the NT as we speak, and based on their findings, we may yet have another link to add to our shared economic future.

This future is not simply bound to mineral and energy resources, but extends to aquaculture and potentially into the stars as well.

Nissui's investments in sea-farming here in the NT have resulted in the creation of the world's largest prawn farming facility in the shape of Project Sea Dragon. This farm produces an annual output of 150,000 tonnes, employing 1,500 Northern Territorians.

So when the world 'pops another shrimp on the barbie', chances are that

many of those prawns will be from the Northern Territory.

The location of the Northern Territory, which is almost on an exact longitudinal parallel with Japan, means that it is ideally suited as a launch platform for Japanese satellites and other space-bound craft.

If it's time for us to shoot for the moon, the NT would be a great place from which to do so.

(4) Culture and Tourism

The Northern Territory has so much to offer, so it is no wonder that people from across the world have been drawn here to make a life for themselves.

One of those is James Paspaley, head of the Paspaley Pearls Group and the Honorary Japanese Consul General to the Northern Territory.

His industry carries on traditions established by Japanese immigrants to the Top End in the late nineteenth century.

In a way, the Northern Territory served as the entry point to Australia, given its proximity to the rest of Asia.

So rather than speaking of the deep south, for the Japanese the NT is more like the near south!

That proximity, which knocks about 3 hours off the usual 9 hour flight from Sydney to Tokyo, is certainly an attractive point for Japanese tourists looking to visit Australia.

Moreover the fact that Indonesia and Thailand are a mere stone's throw away brings added benefits for those seeking a quick commute to Southeast Asia.

The beauty and diversity of the natural world up here is self-evident, yet another unique aspect of the Northern Territory are the indigenous communities here and their vivid representation in art, film, music, and literature.

The cultural influence of indigenous Australians has certainly reached Japan, and was brilliantly displayed a few months ago during the Japanaroo festival

held down in Sydney.

This festival, which is the largest Japanese-themed celebration in Australia, features performances by Japanese and Australian musicians and actors, often in collaboration with one another.

One of these performances was by WABORI, which combines both Aboriginal culture together with Japanese textile and kimono culture.

This is the initiative of Japan-born Australian resident **Tae Gessner**, whose has woven indigenous designs into kimono and other Japanese clothing to stunning effect.

Having never seen this sort of show before, as Ambassador of Japan I can tell you that I was left speechless in admiration.

In the NT and across Australia, Japanese communities are making their mark, and that is proving a bonanza for our bilateral ties.

Australia now has the third largest Japanese diaspora in the world, only after the US and China.

Australia also has the largest number of Japanese language students as a percentage of its overall population.

Did you know that the Northern Territory, with more than 4,500 Japanese language students, has proportionately one of the largest number of students studying Japanese in Australia?

The growth in the Japanese community has caught the interest of Japanese companies, who are making their mark in the Australian market in a myriad of ways.

In 2020, Japan topped the list as the largest accumulated source of foreign direct investment in Australia. And that investment is growing, particularly following the COVID pandemic.

3. Conclusion

Honourable members, ours is indeed a unique and special relationship. We are a reflection of our past while we carry a beacon into our future.

We know that in each other, we have a mate that will see us through thick and thin, lending a hand and helping each other to grow.

While we are at opposite ends of the same region, the warmth of our friendship and scale and scope of our shared interests makes distance irrelevant.

Within this bilateral relationship, the Northern Territory has played and continues to play a pivotal role. Be it defence, energy, or tourism, the NT has much to offer and more besides.

From the red centre to the shores of Melville Island, Territorians can be assured that Japan will work with them to prosper in our shared future.

We're pulling out all the stops to promote our ties with Australia, and the Northern Territory will be major beneficiaries from this.

So let us celebrate our future, for invoking the spirit of the NT News, it will "put a smile on the dial of a crocodile from Ghan to the Mitchell Street Mile."

Thank you.

[Ends]