

Speech

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

On the occasion of the Australia-Japan Society Qld Inc and

Qld Japan Chamber of Commerce & Industry Lunch

1.10pm, 14 June

1. Introduction

Thank you very much Margaret for that generous introduction.

And thank you as well Chris, Margaret and everyone at the Queensland Japan Chamber of Commerce & Industry and the Australia-Japan Society Queensland for bringing this event to fruition.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I must say that it is a wonderful time to be here.

And I'm not just referring to being able to escape the Canberra winter for this Sunshine state.

What I mean is that it is a fantastic time in history for Queensland-Japan relations.

After two long years of pandemic shutdowns, travel and tourism is finally beginning to resume.

Queensland has of course always been a popular destination for Japanese tourists and migrants alike.

Before the pandemic, around half of all Japanese tourists to Australia visited this State.

And around thirty-per-cent of all Japanese residents call Queensland their home.

Likewise, many sport-loving Queenslanders have made it a yearly custom to head to Japan to enjoy its powder snow.

Of course, recently Japan received a very special visit from a very special Australian guest.

It was incredible to see Prime Minister Albanese's commitment to our region through his sprint from Government House to Tokyo.

I was waiting for him at Haneda airport and was delighted to welcome him once again to Japan.

I can let you know that, despite President Biden's kind suggestion, he didn't sleep through any of the Quad meeting.

Not a wink!

It is also a wonderful time for our relations as it is the 50th anniversary of the Australia-Japan Society Queensland Inc.

Its early establishment no doubt stems from the long history between Japan and Queensland, which was the site of Japan's first foreign mission Down Under.

2. Where we are today

Indeed, when we look back on Japan-Queensland history, we see ties underpinned by trade, investment and cultural exchange.

In terms of *trade*, According to the latest statistics for April this year, Japan has become Queensland's largest export destination.

But this is not surprising as Queensland has long contributed greatly to our overall bilateral trading relationship.

Australian sugar has strong connections with Japan stretching back over a century.

Japanese workers planted, hoed, weeded and oversaw production at Queensland sugar plantations.

Today it has captured more than four-fifths of Japan's imported sugar market.

Last year alone, Aussie sugar product exports to Japan totalled five-hundred and thirty-one million dollars' worth.

As a diplomat, I've a pretty large recommended daily sugar intake.

After all, sweet talking is my job.

But even for me, that's a lot of sugar.

Australian beef exports, which now make up around half of Japan's imported beef market, can also be said to be the legacy of strong Queensland ties.

In terms of *investment*, Queensland has been the heartland of Japanese business involvement in this country.

Of course, we all know about the Japanese property investment boom of the eighties.

It brought about some fantastic resorts and golf courses.

If you've ever seen Muriel's Wedding however, you'll know there was a time when Japanese investors were received with suspicion.

Muriel's father, Gold Coast local Bill Heslop, is shown in one scene soliciting bribes from Japanese resort developers.

He didn't even know Japan from China.

Such negative depictions are a thing of the past.

As Bill would say; 'you can't stop progress!'

Today hundreds of Japanese companies conduct business in this State, boosting the local economy and providing jobs.

While historically the focus has been on the tourism and resources sectors, in recent years there have been a diverse range of investments in Queensland's flour milling, packaging and manufacturing industries.

In terms of *cultural exchange*, I'm so delighted by what I see here in Queensland that I'm tempted to finish this speech in Japanese.

Because I hear that over one-hundred and thirty thousand, or *thirty-per-cent* of all Australia's Japanese learners are in this State.

Hopefully some of them are in this room.

Perhaps you might like to raise your hand?

ありがとうございます。I'll be conducting a vocabulary test later for all of you.

Truth be told, I'd like to practice my Aussie English so I'll keep going as planned.

Tell me, is it pronounced cozzies or togs?

And is it Parmy or Parma?

Thank you, that's cleared that up.

What I was going to say is language learning and the people-to-people ties it fosters are very important for the relationship.

Today, Japan and Queensland share over thirty sister city relationships.

Some of them, such as the town of Minami and Cairns since 1969, are among the oldest in Australia.

Personally, I'd love to see the beach town of Oarai in Ibaraki Prefecture form a partnership with a lovely Queensland town.

Oarai has a fantastic tourism mascot called 'Araippe'.

To give you a bit of an idea, Araippe looks similar to the beloved Australian character Grug.

But instead of being covered in grass, he's covered in wriggling whitebait.

And instead of Grug's big droopy nose, he has a giant clam between his eyes.

On a related note, I find the trend of iconic 'Big Things' in Queensland fascinating.

The Big Dinosaur in Ballandean.

The Big Red Elephant in Lockyer Valley.

I don't know if you've noticed, but some of these things are not actually as big as the original.

Nevertheless, it would be great if Oarai could find a sister town with a Big Thing to match Araippe's quirkiness.

But I digress.

Now that I've touched on where we are today, let's look ahead to the future.

3. Looking Ahead

New opportunities are opening up in traditional areas of cooperation such as trade, investment and cultural exchange, but also on new frontiers such as defence.

In terms of *trade and investment*, the changing geopolitical environment is demonstrating the need for diversification and expanded trade with trusted partners.

Many of these changes affect small and medium businesses in particular.

Over ninety percent of all companies in Japan are small to medium enterprises.

So it's safe to say that Japanese businesses understand the challenges such enterprises face.

Japanese companies are also well known for their successful operations in the Indo-Pacific.

As the region grows, there will undoubtedly be opportunities for Australian business to partner with Japanese business to enter new markets.

We know that Japan is already keen to work with Australia on creating sustainable hydrogen supply chains.

Japanese companies are spearheading hydrogen and ammonia pilot projects all around Australia.

In Gladstone half a dozen major Japanese players are working towards the goal of turning it into one of Australia's first hydrogen hubs.

As mentioned, *tourism* is an area where Queensland-Japan relations have traditionally shined.

But there is room for growth.

I know many of you think New South Wales is your greatest rival.

But if you ask Japan, your greatest rival is Hawaii.

With the Brisbane Olympics on the horizon, there is ample opportunity to prove that a Hawaiian shirt looks just as good on Surfers.

The implementation of Japanese high-speed rail technology would certainly be a draw card.

Here in Australia, long car rides are a given.

But the Olympics will be an excellent opportunity to link Australia together with high-speed rail.

The 1964 Tokyo Olympics led to the bullet train between Osaka and Tokyo which expanded into a large-scale network that now covers almost the whole of Japan.

Likewise, the Brisbane Olympics could serve as a starting point for expansion of Australian train infrastructure.

Brisbane 2032 will also be the first Olympics to follow the great milestone in global emissions reduction that will be 2030.

As such it is an opportunity to showcase world-leading low-emissions innovation.

Japan's Tokyo 2020 was the first net zero carbon Olympics.

An enormous amount of arrangements were made to showcase hydrogen, fuel cell and electric vehicles, and recycled materials.

Perhaps you remember hearing about the cardboard beds in the Athletes' village?

Japan is ready to share its experiences with Australia for a successful 2032 Brisbane Games.

The operational challenges were extraordinary, the eight-hundred and fifty thousand plus COVID-19 tests just the tip of the iceberg.

With three-hundred and thirty-nine events in thirty-three sports, they were not only the biggest, but one of the most diverse.

There was a record proportion of female athletes.

And the inclusion of BMX racing saw the inspiring story of Japanese-Aussie Gold Coast locals, the Sakakibara siblings, play out on screens across the globe.

I very much look forward to seeing Saya and her brother Kai continue their careers.

Following Paris and then LA, the Brisbane Olympics and Paralympics could provide a home-field advantage.

Now, on the topic of *cultural ties*, as mentioned, language is a powerful tool of connection.

That's why it is with considerable sadness that I note the trend of diminishing Asian studies tertiary education in this country.

But I believe this also provides a chance for Queensland to be a leader in the field.

Several Queensland universities provide Japanese culture and language related courses, some of them world-leading.

In the area of *defence and security*, opportunities for unprecedented cooperation are increasing day by day.

At the beginning of this year, Japan and Australia signed the Reciprocal Access Agreement.

This agreement significantly increases both the quantity and quality of the bilateral exercises we can conduct together.

This means in the years ahead, the Japan Self-Defense Forces will be paying call to the bases, ports, and training grounds in Australia in greater numbers and with more hardware.

With forty-per-cent of Australian Army personnel based here in Queensland, I have no doubt that more SDF uniforms will be seen around Queensland streets.

I'm sure there's much for them to learn about combat from the State of Origin.

Of course, since the signing of the RAA, there have been significant global developments.

Against the backdrop of the outrageous invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the Quad leaders convened a virtual meeting in March, and again in person last month.

There our nations emphasized that all countries must seek peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law.

Australia, Japan, the United States and India share a strong resolve to maintain peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

This is not new.

But now, more than ever, there is a sense of urgency.

Today's Ukraine should never be allowed to become tomorrow's Taiwan.

Peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is critical not only for regional security, but also for the security of international society.

As proof of our commitment to Ukraine, Japan made the unprecedented move of providing it with non-lethal equipment.

Together with Australia we will act in defence of sovereignty and territorial integrity against those who would seek to infringe it by force and intimidation.

Japan has accepted hundreds of displaced people fleeing from the war in Ukraine.

Here in Queensland too there have been heart-warming stories of Queenslanders opening their homes to Ukrainians.

Hundreds have arrived since the end of February.

After witnessing the growth of Japan-Queensland ties into the mature, mutually-respectful relationship it is today, it doesn't surprise me that this State has shown such compassion and openness.

4. Conclusion

Now, as a big fan of a nice pub parmy, I understand how difficult it can be to stay awake after a hearty lunch.

So I'll wrap up here.

To conclude, I would like to emphasise that the long history of trade, investment and cultural exchange between Japan and Queensland has given us our greatest asset; trust.

Now, more than ever, trust between partners is essential for both national security and economic resilience.

This means the possibilities are endless for Japan-Queensland cooperation.

I look forward to working with the Australia-Japan Society Queensland Inc and the Queensland Japan Chamber of Commerce & Industry to ensure such opportunities are leveraged to the fullest.

Thank you.

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