

Ambassador Yamagami's Speech at Southern Cross University Panel Discussion Opening Remarks

Friday 24 June 2022, 2:00 PM

1. Introduction

Thank you for that introduction, Robert.

I am so grateful to be in this charming part of the world.

I heard you call this the Rainbow Region, which makes me even more grateful to be here, as Canberra is looking fairly grey at the moment.

2. Visit to flood-damaged areas

Despite the recent floods, I am surprised by the good cheer of the people I have met so far, including when I toured some of the flood-affected areas with Mayor Krieg this morning.

What also surprised me were the stories of mates helping each other out.

People risking their lives to carry out rescues in boats and canoes.

Friends lending out caravans and couches so that flood victims have somewhere to sleep.

People delivering supplies by boat to places cut off for days and weeks.

I am impressed by the pace of recovery, but even more so by the resilience and the community spirit of the people of Lismore.

And I am reminded that Japan also experienced heavy rain, flooding and landslides only this time last year.

I think that resilience and community spirit in times of crisis are some of the characteristics our countries share, second only to a love of powder snow and a cold beer.

Before I get too serious, I would also like to acknowledge Mrs Tazuko McLaren, who reached out to me about this trip and who has worked very hard to promote Japan-Australia relations.

3. Sister City Relationship

As many of you will know, Lismore was the first place in Australia to establish a sister-city relationship with a town in Japan – one of the now 107 sister-city relationships between Japan and Australia.

Their enduring relationship symbolises the longevity of Japan-Australia friendship.

Lismore and Yamato Takada, their sister-city in Japan, will celebrate 60 years of their relationship in 2023.

I am not embarrassed to say that I am almost the same age.

I know in Australia some people do not like to celebrate birthdays after a certain age, but in Japan, 60 is a very important birthday – at the same time, too green by Japanese standards.

So while I think I will stop counting my own age sometime soon, Lismore and Yamato Takada should continue to celebrate these important milestones in their relationship.

And what a relationship it is!

With regular visits by mayors, a student exchange program and regular anniversary events, this is one of the most vibrant and dynamic sister-city relationships.

I am also looking forward to tomorrow's lantern festival, where I will be able to see for myself the lantern of Miku-chan – the mascot of Yamato Takada.

You probably know that, in Japan, many towns and cities have mascots that represent the local specialty.

I am sure, if you ask them, the residents of Yamato Takada will be happy to help create a mascot for Lismore.

I have heard that macadamias are a key product of this region – perhaps later I can show you some sketches I have done...

4. The Work of Tony Glynn

Visiting a paradise such as this, it is easy to imagine why many eminent people would want to live in the region. And I'm not just talking about Chris Hemsworth in Byron Bay.

One family who made an incredible contribution to the Japan-Australia relationship is, of course, the Glynn family – notably Fathers Tony and Paul Glynn.

In particular, Father Tony Glynn's impressive life story has become a symbol of Japan-Australia reconciliation, and was even made into a documentary.

He spent over 40 years working as a pastor in Nara Prefecture, carrying out humanitarian work.

He was also one of the pioneers of reconciliation between Australia and Japan after the Second World War.

We see in Fathers Tony and Paul Glynn, the same powerful community spirit and desire to help others that was evident during the recent floods.

Father Tony Glynn also helped to establish the sister-city relationship between Canberra and Nara, which will celebrate 30 years next year.

And with Canberra barely 100 years old and Nara over 1,000 years old, it is very kind of Canberrans to refer to Nara as a 'sister' and not a 'great-great-great grandmother'.

5. The Japan-Australia Relationship

It is because of the contributions of people such as Father Tony Glynn that the Japan-Australia relationship is so strongly anchored in trust and shared values.

This was made ever so clear by Prime Minister Albanese's visit to Japan only hours after being sworn in.

Just like me, the new Prime Minister seems to have a love of travel – I think we have a lot in common.

He worked so hard in Japan that, unfortunately, he did not have time to enjoy my favourite ramen restaurant.

In Tokyo, the leaders of Japan and Australia reiterated their desire to cooperate on many fronts, from security and economy, to climate change and energy.

It is also hoped Prime Minister KISHIDA will visit Australia later this year.

Coming back to our *economic ties*, these have never been stronger than they are now.

Over the past 15 years, trade between our nations has increased by around 60%. Investment has also increased six-fold, and now Japan is Australia's second largest investor.

And, using our strong economic ties as a foundation, we are pursuing emissions reduction, through *hydrogen* and ammonia production.

Did you know that there are over twenty Japanese company-supported hydrogen projects underway across Australia?

One of these is the HESC project, which utilises the *Suiso Frontier*, the world's first liquefied hydrogen carrier, transporting 8,000 tonnes of hydrogen from Victoria all the way to Kobe.

You might be also thinking, 'but what can hydrogen be used for?'

Then, let me tell you – hydrogen is the future!

I experienced this first-hand when I had the chance to sit in the driver's seat of the 'Mirai', Toyota's hydrogen fuel cell vehicle.

This car can reach 100 kilometres per hour with just one tap of the accelerator.

There's probably a good reason they did not let me drive it without supervision!

Projects such as these symbolise the partnership between Japan and Australia which is bringing us closer to cutting carbon emissions and mitigating climate change.

Of course, we have many past generations to thank for the strength and prosperity of today's relationship.

Since the first Japanese mission was opened in Townsville in 1896, Australians and Japanese have been criss-crossing the Pacific Ocean as *traders, investors, tourists, students, teachers, athletes and more*.

Australian tourists are now considered the biggest spenders in Japan, and Japanese tourists continue to seek out Cairns and the Gold Coast for a getaway.

Japanese remains the most widely-studied language in both Australian schools and universities.

I am delighted to see that Southern Cross University not only teaches Japanese, but also regularly sends students to study in Japan, and even to work there post-graduation.

These are opportunities which I hope the younger members of this audience will consider as part of their education.

It will not only teach you about Japan, but you will gain some important life skills – such as knowing where to find the most delicious sushi.

And you will form lifelong friendships which serve to strengthen the foundations of our relationship.

Of course, a friend in need is a friend indeed, and the true magnitude of the relationship between Japan and Australia is felt in the generosity of both sides during *natural disasters*.

Just three days after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, Australia sent RAAF aircraft and an urban search and rescue team. At one point, they even sent as many as three out of four of their C17 aircraft.

And during the Black Summer Bushfires, Japan returned the favour, sending Air-Sea Defence Force aircraft to help transport people and goods.

Additionally, data from Japan's Himawari satellite was used by Australian authorities to monitor the situation on the ground.

More recently, I heard that Yamato Takada gave generously to help flood victims here in Lismore.

I was so impressed to hear that Yamato Takada has donated again and again towards Lismore's recovery – in 2020 after the bushfires, in 2017 after Cyclone Debbie and in 2016 after the floods.

The Mayor of Yamato Takada might be one of the most popular people in Lismore!

But, jokes aside, this is another example of the great community spirit and cooperation that exists in this relationship.

And our cooperation extends far beyond disaster relief.

Japan and Australia are working together on many fronts to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

During regular exercises, our militaries have coordinated closely on the ground, at sea and in the skies.

And in January, we signed the Reciprocal Access Agreement, which enables our militaries to work even more closely together, and enhance deterrence in our region.

Again, this shows the remarkable trust between our countries, and our strong shared values.

What is more, through the activities of the Quad, Japan and Australia are joining together to strengthen other countries in our region and strive further towards a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Prime Minister Albanese's clear statement at the beginning of the Quad meeting in Tokyo that Australia's commitment to the Quad has not changed and will not change was definitely a strong message, which was warmly welcomed.

I always like to reuse the metaphor of a former Prime Minister of Japan, that Japan and Australia will lock arms together 'in a scrum, just like rugby, to nurture a regional and world order and to safeguard peace'.

6. Summary and Conclusion

Extending from tourism, sport and education, to trade and investment, disaster relief and regional security, Japan and Australia not only share a very broad and deep relationship, but one that is ideal.

We cooperate with each other on security, support each other economically, and compete with each other in sports.

More than this, we have always been there for one another, as strong neighbours in the Indo-Pacific region.

The spirit of community and desire to help in times of need still burns strongly since the time of Father Tony Glynn.

This is something I recall whenever I think upon one of the great works in Australian history – *Neighbours*.

“That's when good neighbours become good friends.”

And so I believe our future together is bright! And while it continues to be supported by steadfast, close-knit sister city relationships such as yours, it can only grow stronger.

I'm sure you know that I could go on talking for much longer, but I would like to hear from the others here today about what you think the future holds for the Japan-Australia relationship.