

**Speech by Ambassador SUZUKI Kazuhiro**  
**Ambassador of Japan to Australia**  
**On the occasion of the reception to celebrate the Birthday of**  
**His Majesty the Emperor of Japan**  
**On 13 Feb 2024**

The Honourable Richard Marles, Deputy Prime Minister of Australia and Minister for Defence,  
Senator the Honourable Don Farrell, Minister for Trade and Minister for Tourism,  
The Honourable Scott Morrison, Former Prime Minister of Australia,  
The Honourable David Littleproud, Leader of the Federal National Party,  
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening, and welcome to my residence.

Before I begin my remarks, let me acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

As you know, Japan started this year already facing a formidable challenge as a result of the Noto Peninsula Earthquake.

Therefore, first I'd like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all Australians, in particular Prime Minister Albanese, and to friends and colleagues gathered here and around the world, whose warm messages of sympathy have encouraged many still facing predicaments in Japan.

I also wish to extend my sympathies to all those hit by the severe floods in Queensland and Victoria over summer.

I trust the resilience inherent in our two societies will definitely lead to a robust recovery.

On a much brighter note, tonight we celebrate the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor, which is on February 23rd.

His Majesty has a very long and strong affiliation with Australia, where he had his first ever two-week homestay overseas, exactly 50 years ago when he was only 14.

Some people say that Japan and Australia are allies in all but name. The nine months that I've spent here so far has provided me with plenty of examples of this reality.

Today Australia is NO.1 in the world regarding per capita population of Japanese language learners, reflecting Australians' close affinity for Japan.

I've been amazed to be greeted by so many Australians who speak Japanese with just a trace of an Aussie accent!

The Aussies working here in the Embassy as part of my team are no exception! They are just amazing, you know.

The width and depth of our bilateral exchanges and consultations, not only between our national governments starting with DFAT and my Foreign Ministry, but also between members of our national parliaments, state and regional governments, along with the private sector and academics, are also just astonishing.

Just in the last few weeks, I can point to a Tokyo visit by Minister Madeleine King, who'll be with us shortly by the way, and Tokyo Metropolitan Governor Koike's visit to Sydney, and our Parliamentary Vice-Foreign Minister Komura's visit to Perth just last weekend.

The Annual Australia-Japan Joint Business Conference in Melbourne last October is another case in point. I was astounded to see the scale of 728 top business leaders of both countries gathering together, something I have never experienced before, symbolizing our economic cooperation going beyond traditional domains to achieve net zero.

Today, the deepening of our defence cooperation has also been phenomenal. Southern Jackaroo, Bushido Guardian, Talisman Sabre and Yama Sakura are just some of the exercises our two forces have carried out recently.

Someone is obviously working very hard to think of catchy names for these exercises. Good job, mate! Keep it up!

For me personally, last year I had the privilege of visiting Base Tindal in the Northern Territory to welcome the first arrival of our F35 fighter aircraft for bilateral F35 joint training.

I was moved beyond words when I saw our two countries' F35s lined up next to one another, feeling a great milestone in our own two peoples' historic reconciliation.

Honestly speaking, without the hard work and sweat of my Embassy's defence team, these spectacular

achievements would not have been possible.

I have therefore very mixed feelings about the pending departure for home of Colonel Yosuke Ota, our Defence Attache, who has made an invaluable contribution to our team.

Ota-san, where are you? Please raise your hand. There you are! Let's give him and his family a big round of applause now.

Thank you!

I also want to express my sincere thanks to Minister Farrell for inviting all the Heads of Delegations in Canberra to last year's wonderful diplomatic trip to South Australia, together with Foreign Minister Wong.

To honour your hospitality, the red wine I've selected for tonight is from South Australia. Originally, I wanted to introduce your winery's marvelous Cabernet Sauvignon here tonight. However I've had to go with a substitute, unfortunately, as my budget can only stretch so far!

And Deputy Prime Minister, after my visit to Base Tindal, my next ambition is a trip to Geelong to cheer on the Cats.

Did you know that when I supported the Canberra Cavalry baseball team last December in their match against the top-ranked Adelaide Giants, the Cavalry had a walk-off victory?

I might be able to bring some of that good luck with me to a Cats' match in Geelong, provided of course that I will not be ostracized by other AFL fans in Canberra!

Bringing everything together, Japan and Australia are just like perfect doubles tennis partners who complement each other's strengths and just get better.

So as a practical, not philosophical demonstration of how collaboration between Japan and Australia is a wonderful thing, please enjoy the Aussie beef produced by a Japanese company.

We also feature tonight Genji Soba and Ryokusuiian's sweets, scallops and oysters from Japan, along with other food products from Japanese companies.

I also want to thank all of the tourism, as well as car and other mobility industries for their contributions.

Please do experience the latest technology for yourself.

If you haven't tried a hydrogen car, tonight gives you the perfect opportunity.

I hope you'll also enjoy performances by the Japanese drum players and by a Japanese Robot, Pepper-kun, programmed by the team from Questacon and UC.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks go out to the dedicated staff of the Embassy and the Residence, as well as Chef Takami and his wife Aiko-san, for their tireless efforts in preparation for this wonderful evening.

Thank you.