

Keynote address
by His Excellency Ambassador SUZUKI Kazuhiro
to the Perth USAsia Centre Japan Symposium 2024
University of Western Australia
Monday 25 March 2024

The Honourable Robert French, Chancellor of the University of Western Australia

The Honourable Richard Court,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to speak this evening at the Perth USAsia Centre. In particular, I want to thank my great friends, Gordon and his team and Richard and AJBCC for the invitation and for hosting the 7th Japan Symposium this year.

This symposium has given me a very good excuse to cross this wide brown continent to meet you all here in Perth.

Although given this is my second visit to Perth in the space of six months, perhaps I don't need an excuse!

When I was here in October last year, I got to witness the resumption of direct flights between Perth and Narita, Tokyo. A very happy development, bringing us to each other's door, as it were.

And it is easy to understand why. Western Australia is naturally beautiful, and the people here have always been very open to visitors from Japan.

WA has also become a focal point for security cooperation between us, given its place as Australia's gateway to the Indian Ocean.

It was no accident that our new Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation was signed here in Perth, for what city better symbolizes the Japan-Australia relationship.

It is a relationship built on our shared history of resource partnerships and the enormous

potential that lies in further cooperation in renewable energy and technological innovation between us.

That innovation can appear in the most surprising of places.

During my last trip to WA, I made my way down to Fremantle to the Maritime Museum to see the Australia II in all its glory.

Ben Lexcen's masterpiece was the first boat to ever take the America's Cup from the US in the 132-year history of that event. Sorry, Gordon! It is symbolic of Australian technical innovation, and the strong Australian spirit of rising to a challenge.

Japan has great interest in tapping into the technological skills here in Australia, skills that will be more in demand following the creation of AUKUS. Japan is prepared to cooperate on technology within Pillar 2 of AUKUS when required.

So tonight, I want to express my gratitude for being able to speak about this and other matters in greater detail.

So, what distinguishes the Japan-Australia relationship? Having been in this role for the past ten months, I've come to understand that this country has a very bright future ahead of it.

The fact it took me 5 hours by air and 3 time zones to get here speaks to how vast Australia is. Not only that, you have a growing population of 27 million which is expected to exceed 40 million over the next 40 years.

Coming from Japan, that is indeed an enviable statistic.

Australia is also home to many highly ranked universities according to World University Rankings, including yours, the University of Western Australia. You've got a lot of whiz kids doing extraordinary things here.

So how has this translated into action?

In May of 2022, Prime Minister Albanese, within 10 hours of being sworn into office, made his way to Tokyo with Foreign Minister Wong to attend the Quad Summit together with the US

and India.

That visit also marked the first of Prime Minister Albanese's Japan-Australia summits.

Since then, we have had another eight Japan-Australia summits, which is an extraordinary degree of contact between our leaders.

Following the visit by Prime Minister Albanese to China in November last year, Foreign Minister Wong quickly followed this up with a visit to Japan to hold discussions.

A week later, there was US-China, Japan-China and then Japan-Australia summits held in this order on the sidelines of the APEC in San Francisco.

What all this demonstrates is how closely Japan, Australia and the US are coordinating our policies, even at the highest leadership level.

Southeast Asia and the Pacific are two further regions where Japan and Australia share interests and where we are closely coordinating our activities.

Japan hosted a 50th Anniversary Commemorative Summit with ASEAN in December last year, and Australia has just finished hosting its ASEAN Special Summit.

In mid-July, Japan will be hosting the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting, which has its 30th anniversary this year.

All of these events have taken place with close coordination between us.

This is as it should be, given that Japan and Australia are key countries in the Indo-Pacific promoting the realization of a free and open region together with our QUAD partners the US and India.

Sometimes we see misunderstandings as if the QUAD were to be quasi-military alliance based on 'Cold-War' mentality.

But in reality, we are strongly focused on building region-based cooperation to bring about concrete benefits for all, such as infrastructure development, climate change, humanitarian

assistance, disaster relief, critical and emerging technologies, cyber and maritime-security.

This is a key reason why India has been very proactively committed to this initiative.

Speaking of our actual security relationship, on August 13 last year the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) came into effect.

Just two weeks later, Japanese JASDF F-35As visited Australia. This marked the first time the RAA had been applied.

Japan and Australia will continue to promote mutual security cooperation. What this means is that there will be a lot more progress in terms of joint military training and equipment and technology exchanges.

With all this talk about technology, this provides me with a perfect opportunity to segue into talking about our economies, which I know is a major area of interest for you all.

One significant event for me personally over the past 10 months was the 60th AJBCC (Australia Japan Business Cooperation Committee) and the JABCC Joint Business Conference held in Melbourne in October last year.

The Conference saw 728 attendees from leading Japanese and Australian businesses, including many of you here this evening.

I have attended many business conferences between Japan and the US over the 35 years of my career as a diplomat, but I've never seen an event of this scale and with this many attendees. It was a phenomenal success.

The three major topics of discussion were 1) innovation, 2) bilateral technology cooperation and 3) the clean energy transition.

Many Japanese business executives felt that there are many new business opportunities emerging between Japan and Australia in areas including hydrogen, ammonia, rare earths, CCS (Carbon Capture Storage), CCUS and other climate change-related businesses and projects, in addition to space and other related sciences and technologies.

More specifically, the obvious potential for cooperation between Japan and Australia in energy transition in order to achieve net-zero is one key issue that many Japanese investors took away from the conference.

Japan and Australia achieving net-zero alone will not be enough to cope with climate change.

Japan has a competitive advantage in its rich capital and technological strength, while Australia has vast resources and land, along with an excellent natural environment to generate wind and solar power.

This is why cooperation between Japan and Australia is so significant in the struggle to reduce global CO2 emissions.

Australia possesses abundant resources including natural gas, which emits less CO2 than coal when used to generate electricity.

Australia has a rich renewable energy potential and makes it an important partner in the supply of minerals to support the energy transition process.

It is crucial for both sides to attract further investment in technologies and to make a greater global contribution to emissions reduction as leaders in the energy transition sector.

Japan excels in making energy-saving technologies.

Japanese companies are currently leading the field in the construction of environmentally friendly homes, with major companies like Sekisui House and Sumitomo Forestry promoting the construction of Net-Zero Energy Houses (with excellent insulation, solar power generation and the like, giving it an annual energy consumption balance of zero).

I have heard from housing industry associations that one in ten houses built in Australia have some level of Japanese corporate involvement in their construction.

This demonstrates just how important Japanese home energy-saving technology is to Australia and to the wider world.

Both Japan and Australia recognize how important resource and energy security is following

the situation in Ukraine.

It emphasizes the need to diversify sources for mineral resources and energy supplies in order to reduce dependence on any one country.

We have been cooperating on decarbonization for a long time, so we are natural partners to strengthen our collaboration in this field.

Many of you were here during Prime Minister Kishida's visit to Australia in 2022, during which the "Japan-Australia Critical Minerals Partnership" was signed here in Perth.

Japan wants to cooperate as much as possible with Australia, which itself aims to become a renewable energy superpower, to achieve our mutual goal of regional decarbonization.

So long story short – we need you as much as you need us as we journey along the path towards net-zero. It's the very definition of a symbiotic relationship.

And so, ladies and gentlemen, here in Perth, I feel the strategic importance of Western Australia to both of our countries in terms of location and resource volume will only continue to grow in the years ahead.

WA's Canberra Hub office opening this Wednesday, won't be too far from the Embassy. So, if you are planning to come to Canberra in the near future, by all means get in touch with us.

The doors of the Embassy of Japan are always open to our friends of WA, and we very much look forward to hosting you should you happen to visit.

Thank you very much.