

**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 Wednesday 12 February 2025**

The Honourable Richard Marles,

Senator the Honourable Tim Ayres,

The Honourable David Littleproud,

Senator Catryna Bilyk,

Admiral David Johnston,

Secretary Jan Adams,

And allow me to also acknowledge the Honourable Madeleine King, who was here earlier,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present, and emerging.

Tonight, we celebrate the most auspicious and the largest annual event for our Embassy, that is the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor, which is on 23 February.

Throughout my work as ambassador for a year and 9 months, on every level and in every place I have visited in Australia, so keenly have I felt just how much Japan and the Japanese people are loved and admired by Australians. I wanted therefore to start by expressing my sincere gratitude to you all for this.

In order to back up my feelings with data, I've been saying on many occasions.

That Japan has been the country most trusted by Australians among the world's key nations for four consecutive years, according to the Lowy Institute's poll.

That Australia has the largest number of Japanese language learners per capita in the world.

And, just last year, the number of Japanese expats in Australia grew to be the second largest

overseas Japanese community in the world, following the U.S. but larger than that in China.

But, considering their huge sizes, the proportion of Japanese living in Australia far outweighs both of them.

The remarkable bonds between Japan and Australia we enjoy today are, however, woven from the selfless goodwill, genuine compassion and mutual respect of a vast number of citizens from both nations.

This is the point I've always kept in my mind when I tell you this data.

Let me share a story with you.

As you may know, people in the Noto Peninsula, Japan, experienced a devastating earthquake on New Year's Day last year, with 412 fatalities and 6,425 completely destroyed houses, followed by torrential rains during September last year causing landslides which flooded 1,800 houses.

In quickly responding to this merciless double disaster that broke the victims' hearts, the Australia-Japan Society of the ACT hosted a charity concert in my Residence just after the flood in order to show their solidarity with the people in Noto.

So thank you Diane Fitzpatrick and the Australia-Japan Society for your initiative, and I'd also like to thank all of the Aussies who stood by the victims during their greatest trials.

The idyllic New South Wales city of Cowra, located 2 hours' drive away from Canberra, is another example. Last year memorial events were held to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cowra Breakout, an incident that saw a large loss of life.

To have joined Prime Minister Albanese in laying wreaths at the Japanese and Australian War Cemeteries, which have been so beautifully maintained through everyday support from the citizens of Cowra, whose representatives led by Mayor Paul Smith join us here this evening, was deeply significant.

As for myself, next week I will attend memorial ceremonies to honour the spirits of all those that lost their lives in the air raids in Darwin, the city which holds a special place in our relations.

Despite suffering the greatest number of lives lost on this Continent during World War Two, last year's hosting of the Japan-Australia-US Defence Ministers' Meeting was warmly welcomed in Darwin thanks to the numerous efforts of the many locals there.

We will never forget these genuine and selfless volunteer services rendered by ordinary citizens in many Australian communities.

Ladies and gentlemen, when we recall the harsh past in which Australian and Japanese soldiers faced each other in fierce battles across the Pacific, the outstanding state of Japan-Australia friendship after these 80 years stands as a testament to the power of reconciliation between nations that were once enemies.

It is a perspective that is especially poignant in today's world, where armed conflicts between nations and within a nation continue to arise.

Today, our defence cooperation is advancing at an unprecedented pace. Last year we had 4 bilateral Defence ministers' meetings, along with 39 joint exercises. 39 times means that the ADF and JSDF are training together every 9 days somewhere in the world. No wonder they are real mates now.

Tonight I am also honoured to welcome our Senior Advisor to the Minister of Defense, Mr Kenji Wakamiya, who held distinguished positions in the Diet and as Minister of State for the Cabinet Office and State Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Thank you, Mr. Wakamiya, for travelling all the way from Japan to join us at this reception. Your presence underscores the current state of our partnership, that is; we are allies in all but name.

Ladies and gentlemen, our bilateral economic relations continued to grow last year.

Traditional sectors like resources, energy, and agricultural exports to Japan – have been thriving. But our businesses are also expanding into new areas such as financial services, housing, and retail, as well as renewables, space and defence industries.

One testament to the great optimism about the future of Japan Australia economic cooperation is the presence of many Japanese business leaders tonight.

I must congratulate Mitsubishi Heavy Industry for opening your new Canberra office last month.

Hopefully other Japanese companies will follow suit.

But most importantly, I must thank the very tangible contributions that you all have made. Thank you all for the great range of attractions on display, showcasing Japanese technology and expertise, working with local communities. And of course, your food and drinks.

And for those who didn't know about the opportunity to PR your products to the guests gathered here tonight, we are happy to host yours next year.

We will also have 2 players from the Canberra Raiders participating here tonight.

You certainly have a lot of different kinds of football here in Australia. And you're so good at all of them for both men and women.

But Japan is catching up, although I think a Japanese AFL team might take a bit longer, if I'm being honest.

Tonight, here we have the most distinguished special envoy to promote Expo Osaka, Kansai at our Reception. So ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce: Myaku Myaku! Over there!

Myaku Myaku is much more popular than I am, and has 10 times more followers on the Embassy's social media accounts than I do!

So, if you want to increase the number of followers on your SNS, taking a selfie with Myaku Myaku is better than doing it with me. Of course I'm not jealous. We are good friends, you know.

Last year the number of annual visits by Australians to Japan surpassed 920,000. Only one step away from reaching 1 million. The Expo is indeed an opportunity to further strengthen our economic cooperation and people-to-people ties.

So when you return home tonight, you all must consult with your families and make plans for a vacation to Japan. The EXPO will open from mid-April to mid-October this year.

For all of my fellow Heads of Mission here, please waste no time in receiving your Foreign Minister's permission to have some vacation time in Japan.

Of course, if you can combine it with your business trip to see your Japanese counterparts, you'll be even more welcome!

Tonight also marks the last major reception for Captain Amanuma, who has contributed greatly to the defence ties between Japan and Australia.

I'd like to share that, as a result of her deep love for Australia, Amanuma-san's daughter has decided to stay on in Australia to continue studying here after her family returns to Japan.

This is indeed an example of Australia's captivating allure that attracts young people. This is the power of Australia. So let us all give a round of applause to honour Captain Amanuma's contribution and wish his family's continued success in the future.

Thank you.

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.

Without your tireless efforts in preparation over many weeks, the wonderful evening we share now would not have been possible.

So thank you, and thank you everyone for coming to our Emperor's Birthday Reception tonight.

Thank you!

**[Ends]**