

Speech by His Excellency Ambassador SUZUKI Kazuhiro

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(Acknowledgement of Country)

[As prepared]

Professor Gordon Flake, Chief Executive Officer of Perth USAsia Centre,

My dear senpai, Mr Masafumi Ishii, Former Ambassador of Japan to Indonesia,
Platform Managing Director of Japan Institute of International Affairs,

The Hon Richard Court, Former Premier of Western Australia, Former Ambassador
of Australia to Japan, Member of the Board of Perth USAsia Centre,

Ladies and gentlemen,

- When I visited Western Australia about a year ago, I travelled up to Broome. There, I paid my respects at the graves of nearly 1,000 Japanese who worked in the pearling industry from the late 19th century .
- Standing there, I felt—very personally—the weight of history: the people who helped shape the earliest chapter of Japan–Australia ties, and how deeply Western Australia is woven into that story.
- Today, Australia supplies around 40% of Japan’s LNG imports. And Australia’s LNG export story began here in Western Australia—starting with the North West Shelf’s first cargo shipped to Japan.
- To reach agreement on that project, Japanese and Australian resource and energy companies conducted extraordinarily detailed negotiations more than 40 years ago. That careful commercial work laid a foundation that still supports our energy security today.

- The most unforgettable development for me during my own term as Ambassador, and the project I have felt most strongly responsible for—has been the selection of Japan’s upgraded Mogami-class for the Royal Australian Navy’s General Purpose Frigate program.
 - It was a truly landmark moment that lifted Japan–Australia cooperation to a new level. And importantly, sustainment and shipbuilding work for this major defence project is expected to take place here in Perth in the future.
 - Perth is unique, being the last city on the Australian mainland to be touched by the morning sun. But as I’ve described just now, many of the most innovative steps in Japan–Australia relations have begun here in Western Australia.
 - That is no accident. It reflects decades of people-to-people connections between Japan and Western Australia.
 - This year, on 16 June, the Basic Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation—also known as the Nara Treaty—marks its 50th anniversary. So today, based on the Japan–Australia relationship we have built over these past 50 years, I would like to look ahead to the next 50.
 - I think many of you will agree: the progress in recent years has been remarkable.
1. From just six sister-city relationships in 1976, we now have 107.
 2. Australia now has the second-largest Japanese expatriate community in the world, and the largest number of Japanese language learners per capita in the world.

3. Japan welcomed over one million visitors from Australia last year—a new record. And the Australian Pavilion at the Osaka Expo drew 3 million visitors.
 4. For the fifth year in a row, the 2025 Lowy Institute Poll rated Japan as Australia’s most trusted partner—reaching over 90% for the first time.
 5. Japan has been the only country whose FDI in Australia has steadily increased over the past 11 years. And we had 707 participants at the Australia–Japan Joint Business Conference here in Perth last October—another record.
 6. The level of defence cooperation is now so active that, honestly, it’s hard even for me to keep track of how many defence-related activities are taking place in a single week.
- The list goes on.
 - So what is the tailwind behind us? What has brought Japan and Australia to the point where we are, in many ways, allies in all but name?
 - It is because Japan and Australia are like-minded democracies in the Indo-Pacific. Our economies are complementary. And—most importantly—we have invested patiently, over many years, in friendship at the people-to-people level.
 - Now, based on today’s strong relationship, what is the key task for the next 50 years?
 - In my view, it is to deepen Japan–Australia strategic integration—across economics, security, and beyond.

- As the global order faces unprecedented uncertainty, including shifts in the domestic politics of both the United States and China, this deeper integration is strategically important for both Japan and Australia.

- I am optimistic that this integration will continue. The progress I have just listed gives me confidence. Yet I also believe our two governments can do more to accelerate it. Today, I would like to highlight three areas.

- First: advanced manufacturing.
- By 2017, global carmakers—including Japanese companies—had withdrawn from manufacturing vehicles in Australia. I suspect the reasons included:
 1. Australia's production costs were too high to be absorbed by the price of mass-market cars; it was clearly reasonable from the cost perspective to manufacture in Thailand or Indonesia and then export to Australia.
 2. The sales market was largely domestic, limiting scale.
 3. There was a lack of sustained, long-term industry policy support at the federal level based on national interest.

- Against that background, the federal government has made a strong start with the Future Made in Australia program, and the Western Australian Government has launched the Made in WA Plan.

- What will matter now is building industries in high-value, frontier technology—where unit prices are high, and where advanced capability matters.

- Defence and space are clear examples. The frigate program— and Australia’s selection of Japan’s Mogami-class—sits squarely in this category.
- Japan and Australia must ensure this project succeeds—not only for the frigates themselves, but as a platform to expand cooperation across other naval programs and wider defence equipment areas. That will strengthen the resilience of both countries’ defence capabilities.
- Western Australia is also a key location for the future of AUKUS. It has both the space and the industrial potential to grow. The opportunity to develop defence and space industries here is enormous.
- Second: critical minerals.
- Western Australia’s potential in this sector has already been proven through projects like Lynas–Sojitz in rare earths, and Alcoa–Sojitz in gallium.
- In thinking about how to grow this sector, I would stress three points.
- First, this is a key national security issue. The U.S. Congressional Research Service reported that rare earth materials required to produce one F-35 are about 417 kilograms, and for one Virginia-class submarine about 4.17 tonnes.
- Second, rare earths are also essential for many other advanced products. This goes beyond just economics—it is security. And it is also an economic security issue, because it can be used as a tool of economic coercion. Both Japan and Australia both face national security risks in this area.

- This is precisely why governments need to address this issue strategically over the medium to long term.
- Third, our success depends on building strong, cross-border supply chains. Lynas began rare earth processing in Malaysia, and that points to a broader truth: resilience will require regional coordination.
- It was therefore highly symbolic that many countries—and not just advanced economies—joined the U.S. Critical Minerals Ministerial hosted on 4 February.
- This is why Southeast Asia—literally located between Western Australia and Japan—becomes strategically important. For Japan and Australia, this should be a long-term effort, centred on Western Australia and engaging with Southeast Asia.
- Third: we have the issue of housing.
- Australia’s population is growing at an extraordinary pace—around 1.5% per year—and housing shortages have become a serious social and economic issue.
- Meanwhile, Japan’s housing manufacturers face long-term domestic market shrinkage due to population decline, and are seeking to expand into overseas markets.
- Japan also has a tradition of high-quality, fast-build industrialised housing. That could provide a base to support productivity gains in Australia. The potential is clearly win-win—but cooperation is only just beginning.
- That is why, since my arrival, the Embassy has been working with state governments and industry to hold housing seminars in Australia’s major cities on housing.

- I would like to hold our next one here in Perth. Personally, I would also love to see Australian financial institutions provide financing to Japanese housing manufacturers, helping them to invest and build factories in Australia.
- Among Japan's many housing manufacturers, only Sekisui House currently has a factory in Australia. I visited its facility outside Sydney, and I can assure you that it can build attractive detached homes very efficiently. I want to bring more of such factories to Australia.
- I also want to underline that, right now, it is a very attractive time for Australians to invest in Japan.
- A recent article in The Economist noted that, according to its Big Mac Index, the Japanese yen is undervalued by roughly 50% — and Goldman Sachs reportedly estimates long-run fair value at around 90 yen to the U.S. dollar, compared with around 153 yen at present.
- No wonder I feel poorer as an Ambassador in Canberra than my predecessors!
- But jokes aside, this can be a real opportunity. Greg Goodman is already investing heavily in Japan, including in data centre construction.
- I hope that kind of initiative spreads across to Western Australia.
- I am also hosting an Invest Japan promotion seminar on 30 March in Sydney—so if you are interested, please check with our Embassy to see whether places are still available.

- Finally, the next 50 years of our relationship must belong to the younger generation. Future Made in Australia should allocate part of its resources to advancing R&D—especially education and training for talented students and researchers in science and technology.
- Starting here at the University of Western Australia, Australia has nine universities in the QS World Top 100. The U.S. has 26, and the UK has 17—so Australia is number three. Australia’s population is just over 27 million, while the UK has 69 million.
- If Australia had the same population as the UK, you’d probably have about 23 universities in the Top 100—easily beating the Poms, just as you did in the cricket over the summer.
- I use that line quite often, and it usually goes down well—so thank you to those of you laughing at it again today!
- But in all seriousness, many Japanese students in science and engineering still do not fully realise how much Australia can offer as a fertile ground for new inspiration.
- Since 1958, hundreds of talented Australians have studied in Japan on MEXT scholarships. I hope that, in the years ahead, many excellent Japanese students will also come to study in Australia—and that exchange will grow strongly in both directions.
- As we mark the 50th anniversary of the Nara Treaty, it would be most welcome if the Australian Government were to establish an initiative to invite outstanding young researchers and graduate students to Australia, enabling them to study and collaborate alongside Australian researchers and then to extend such opportunities to Japanese students.

- And if the first of those Japanese researchers were to study here at the University of Western Australia, it would be especially fitting—because, as I said at the very start of my remarks, Western Australia has long been a trailblazer in Japan–Australia relations.

- Thank you.

[Ends]