

Speech by Consul-General Masato Takaoka  
**National Day Reception**  
**on the Occasion on the Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor**  
Tuesday 2 December 2014

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**Mr Brian Davies**, representing the Governor of New South Wales,  
**The Honourable Bradley Hazzard**, Attorney-General of New South  
Wales, representing the Premier,  
**The Honourable Tom Bathurst**, Chief Justice of New South Wales,  
**The Honourable Don Harwin**, President of the Legislative Council  
of New South Wales,  
Members of Parliament, including **Ms Natasha Maclaren-Jones**  
and **Mr Guy Zangari** who visited Japan this year with the  
Australian Political Exchange delegation,  
Mayors,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you all for joining me this evening to celebrate His Majesty the Emperor of Japan's birthday. On the 23rd of December, His Majesty will turn 81. I would like to take this opportunity to wish His Majesty continued good health.

It is my first time to host a national day reception here in Sydney, and it is a tremendous honour to do so and to welcome so many friends of Japan and the Japan-Australia relationship.

It is impossible for me to mention everyone I would like to, but I would like to acknowledge the presence of:

Firstly, **Mr Robert McNeil** of Fire and Rescue New South Wales, who was invited by Prime Minister Abe to attend his historic address in July before the Australian Parliament. During his address, Prime

Minister Abe expressed his deep appreciation to Mr McNeil, who led a search and rescue team of 79 people and 2 dogs to Japan immediately after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Secondly, with us today are several members of a group of eminent businesspeople who accompanied Prime Minister Tony Abbott on his official visit to Japan in April this year:

**Professor Philip Cox**, Founding Partner and Director of Cox Architecture, and

**Mr Alf Moufarrige**, CEO of Servcorp.

Long-time friend of Japan, **Mr Bob Seidler**, was also part of that important delegation.

I should not forget to mention **Ms Kumi Taguchi** who has skipped out from her normal duties at ABC News 24 this evening. She has just got married *and* has delayed the start of her honeymoon to be here. Congratulations on your marriage, Kumi.

I wish I could mention everyone, but obviously nobody likes too long a speech, so once again, a very, very warm welcome to *all* of you.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am sure everyone agrees that 2014 has been a very important year in Japan-Australia relations. As I mentioned earlier, we saw an exchange of prime ministerial visits – Prime Minister Abbott in April, and Prime Minister Abe in July.

The Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement is going to boost our business and economic ties. Our partnership is strategic. Our two countries are strengthening our political and security cooperation to ensure peace and stability in the region and beyond.

I also should mention that Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and Tony Abbott have developed a solid personal relationship of trust.

This year they not only met in Tokyo and Canberra; they travelled together to the Pilbara, and they met in New York, Beijing, Myanmar and Brisbane – so many times that I'm beginning to lose count!

Our two Prime Ministers are committed to elevating our bilateral ties to a new special relationship

Japan and Australia are bound by close connections not only at the top level, but by millions of ties of friendship including, of course, many of the sister city relationships formed between us, as represented by a number of mayors with us today..

These friendships, however, might be tested at the end of next month here in Sydney, when Japan's Samurai Blue and the Socceroos should be facing each other in the final of the Asian Cup. To my Australian friends, sorry, I am afraid that the Samurai Blue will win.

And from 2016, there will be a new sporting rivalry between us. Last month, it was confirmed that Japan will be joining the Super Rugby competition and therefore we will be taking on the Waratahs. This time, to my Australian friends, please be nice to us as the newcomers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Japanese community in Sydney, the 7<sup>th</sup> largest in the world, is going to hold its own Matsuri festival, on Saturday next week at Darling Harbour. We are very excited to contribute to the vibrant multiculturalism that makes Sydney such an exceptional place.

Thank you for your friendship and for being with us this evening.