

Japan REPORTS

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From the Desk of the Consul-General in Sydney

Dear Readers,

This is the first issue for 2011 and I would like to wish you a happy new year. For me it was my first time to see in the year in Australia, and with the New Year falling at the height of summer, I really appreciated that I am now living in the southern hemisphere.

This year is the year of the rabbit. I hope that just as the rabbit can take great leaps forward, Australia-Japan relations will also make great progress in 2011.

As you would know, Japan and Australia enjoy a good relationship built on the foundations of close trading ties and a history of friendship stretching over half a century. However, we should not take this good relationship for granted. Just as you would tend a garden by watering it regularly and weeding it, it is important that we look at our relationship each day, ensuring that contact and exchange are not allowed to wither, and that we work to strengthen our ties.

The strategies announced by Japan's Cabinet to grow the economy include economic cooperation, resource diplomacy, entering overseas infrastructure projects, and promoting tourism – all these policies make Japan newly aware of the importance of Australia.

In November 2010, Foreign Minister Maehara visited Australia, his first bilateral visit after assuming office (cf. p.3). He spoke with leaders of the Australian government about strengthening cooperation in these areas. In particular the issue of rare earth minerals imports was raised and the importance of Australia as a long-term and stable supplier of natural resources was reaffirmed.

Then in December, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Banno and Senior Vice Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Matsushita came to Australia to actively follow up

how this economic diplomacy should be practically carried out with the Australian side, particularly at the state level.

Japan is facing many challenges, from structural problems caused by its ageing and declining population to economic problems caused by the strong yen and deflation. However, I believe that in overcoming these risks new possibilities open up. Various problems that Japan faces or has faced are the same problems that rapidly developing countries in

Asia face. Already environmental problems and problems arising from urbanization are becoming serious issues. In these areas Japan has much experience and many technologies that I feel it can share with Asia and the world, contributing to the continuing betterment of humankind. Soft power – from traditional to pop culture – is also one of Japan's strengths. In this way Japan is a mature nation, and there are possibilities in many fields to develop cooperative ties with Australia – a comparatively youthful nation with strong growth. Indeed this is what we should do, and I will do my utmost to facilitate this.

The Japan-Australia relationship encompasses politics and security too. And behind this lie our two countries' shared universal values such as freedom, human rights and democracy. It is important to further strengthen our relationship of mutual trust as we uphold these values.

Ties between countries and their political leaders will

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Dr Masahiro Kohara speaking at the Australia-Japan Economic Outlook Conference, 18 November

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