

Japan REPORTS

The Consulate-General of Japan in Sydney's
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News from the Consul-General of Japan

Dear Readers,

This issue has a focus on exchange.

When I am asked to speak about Australia-Japan relations, I often refer to the real foundation of our relationship being the people-to-people ties between our two countries. I truly believe this is no exaggeration. Of course, government-level ties and economic ties are very important, but potentially, far more influential than treaties and agreements are grass-roots connections, particularly in an individual's experience.

In this issue there are several reports from young Australians who have participated in the Japanese government's KIZUNA project. KIZUNA means 'bonds' in Japanese and the KIZUNA project is the successor to the 5-year JENESYS program. Students from 41 countries and regions have taken part in KIZUNA visiting Japan including the disaster affected area. Japanese students also visit

participating countries and this month a group of Japanese high school students and another of university students visited Sydney and New South Wales. I was pleased to hear that many former JENESYS and KIZUNA Australian participants were happy to assist the Sydney-based programs. I can see that strong KIZUNA have already been formed.

This month I also visited Nelson Bay in beautiful Port Stephens at the invitation of the local Rotary club. As most people would know, Rotary is an international body which has long promoted exchange and international understanding. Many young people have benefited from doing international exchange on a Rotary scholarship—it was a pleasure to meet Rotary exchange students from different countries including Japan at the meeting*.

I was invited to give a speech on Australia-Japan relations by the club at the initiative of their esteemed member, Mr Bart Richardson, a former Japanese prisoner of war, who went to Japan in November 2011 as a guest of the Japanese Foreign Ministry. Although I was the guest speaker, after hearing Mr Richardson's introduction of me, I was left speechless for several minutes. He spoke off the cuff, but I recall what he said.



Consul-General Kohara [3rd from left] at the Rotary Club of Nelson Bay meeting on 7 March with Rotary exchange students Alessia Martinez Vaena (Mexico), Ryosuke Ono (Japan), Johan Stolch (Germany), and Bart Richardson OAM and Vere Gray [left to right]

He was unsure what to expect when he came to meet me with his daughter, Ms Vere Gray, in October 2011, because I was the first Japanese person he had met since being a POW when the only Japanese he knew were the prison guards. After meeting with me, he told his daughter that he liked me and that if all Japanese were like me the trip would be very good. "They were and it was." I am honoured he now feels that I am his Japanese friend.

Australia and Japan now have a strong history of friendship. This year is the 50th Anniversary of the very first sister-city relationship between Australia and Japan, between Lismore in northern New South Wales and Yamato-Takada in Nara Prefecture. Today Japan and Australia share 6 sister-state (including Tokyo-NSW), 103 sister-city, 8 sister-port and numerous sister-school relationships. At the last count there were 658 sister schools. Could the founders of the first sister-city relationship have ever thought there would be more than 100 sister-city relationships between our two countries? It is perhaps hard to imagine how novel the decision by the local governments of Lismore and Yamato-Takada must have been at the time.

Masahiro Kohara
March 2013

* See article in Port Stephens Examiner: www.portstephensexaminer.com.au/story/1359245/big-turnout-for-japan-rotary-night/

INSIDE: • Consul-General's activities • KIZUNA special report
• Doll Festival and Children's Day • Destination Japan: Nara—home to Australia's first Japanese sister-city