

## **Consul-General of Japan in Sydney's Newsletter**

### **No. 37 Japan-Australia Exchange - Coming together for areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake**

26 March 2021

Where were you when the Great East Japan Earthquake happened on 11 March 2011? Already ten years have passed since that day.

This year on 11 March in Sydney, a 10 year commemorative event for the Great East Japan Earthquake was held. Around 300 people attended and I had the honour to give the opening remarks. While remembering the victims of the disaster, we looked back over the 10 years of support for reconstruction efforts and the decade of exchange.

On the same day, in Bathurst, which is about 3 hours by car from Sydney, a tree planting ceremony was conducted to commemorate 10 years since the disaster struck their sister city Ohkuma in Fukushima Prefecture and the rebuilding since. Deputy Consul-General Tanaka attended the tree planting ceremony, and the following week, I visited Bathurst and conveyed my gratitude.

Through this series of events, I was moved to see that many people living in Australia opened their hearts to people in the disaster-affected areas, not only giving their support in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, but also through exchange with the people of Tohoku through to this day. In this issue of my newsletter, as I report on these events, I would like to reflect with you all on the results of exchange born from the long years of exchange in the decade since.



**Mr Robert McNeil, then leader of the Australian Urban Search and Rescue Team, receiving a commemorative award after his speech from a representative from the disaster affected area**

**(11 March 2021 – photo courtesy Rainbow Project)**

### **• East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami 10th Commemoration**

The 10th commemoration held in Sydney was planned and organized by Japan Club of Sydney (JCS) Rainbow Project as an event to round-off their 10 years of activity.

After Sydney Sakura Choir sang Kimigayo (the Japanese national anthem) and I gave the opening speech, participants all observed 1 minute's silence at 2.46pm Japan time together with people in Tohoku, connected via live streams with commemorations taking place in Minami-sanriku Town and Higashi-matsushima City in Miyagi Prefecture and Kamaishi City in Iwate Prefecture. Then, Mr Robert McNeil, leader of the Australian Urban Search and Rescue Team in 2011 (current Assistant Commissioner, Fire and Rescue NSW), gave a speech, and then, a commemorative award was presented to him. Due to COVID restrictions on the number of people in the venue, other members of the Australian Urban Search and Rescue Team participated virtually.

My speech was an opportunity to convey the sincere gratitude of the Government of Japan to the people of Australia for their multifaceted support at the time of the disaster as well as to everyone who supported the disaster-affected areas and exchange activities over the 10 years of the Rainbow Project. Additionally, I explained that reconstruction in the disaster-affected areas has made great progress and urged people to travel to Tohoku post COVID. Furthermore, I said that Japan would like to cooperate with Australia and share with the world the lessons they have learnt from their experience of disaster management.



**Holding candles at the venue  
(11 March 2021 – photo courtesy Rainbow Project)**

After the speeches, there were performances to introduce various aspects of Japanese culture, including from Tohoku; these were a way to convey gratitude to Australia and to express the thoughts of people living in Sydney to those in the disaster-affected areas.

Among the many acts was a calligraphy performance conveying thanks to Australia. The audience waved candles as a choir sang several songs including “Hana wa saku (flowers bloom)” which was the theme song of the relief effort. There were also Japanese drumming and koto music, and a performance of Onikenbai, a traditional type of dance from Iwate Prefecture. An original film was screened, showcasing the history of the Rainbow Project and the beauty of each prefecture in Tohoku.

The event was in fact a message from all the local stakeholders - including from around 30 Japanese businesses which lent their support and cooperation to the event - that wanted to come together to support the people of Tohoku. During the interval, a special bento was served by a local Japanese restaurant using produce from Tohoku. Booths sold products made in Tohoku with the profits going to charity. Scenes from the event were broadcast widely on TV news in Japan.



**Samurai Festival in Sydney by high school students  
from Minamisoma City in Fukushima Prefecture  
(9 August 2016 – photo courtesy Rainbow Project)**

- **A decade of exchange with children in the disaster-affected area**

Attending the commemorative event this year, I was made strongly aware of the significance of the decade of exchange with children in the disaster-affected area by Rainbow Project. To date, Rainbow Project has invited more than 70 children from the Tohoku region to Sydney to engage in exchange.

From the early days after the disaster through to 2017, children from the affected area undertook homestays and experienced Australian traditional events and sports, deepening understanding of other cultures and at the same time conveying the current circumstances in Tohoku to Australians. From 2018, Rainbow Project began the “Global Youth Education Program”; the participants chose their own issue relating to reconstruction in the affected areas and the projects were implemented and received support in both Sydney and Japan. In addition, in 2016, high school

students from Minamisoma City in Fukushima Prefecture were invited to Sydney and the students held Samurai Festivals in various places such as Martin Place in Sydney.

At this year's commemorative event, messages were sent by children who participated in these activities and the results of surveys were reported. It was clear to see that for every child, the experience of visiting Sydney greatly contributed to their sense of confidence and personal development.



**Bathurst Mayor Bobby Bourke and Deputy Consul-General Tanaka Noriko  
at the tree planting ceremony  
(11 March 2021)**

- **A tree planting ceremony to commemorate 10 years since the Great East Japan Earthquake**

The city of Bathurst signed a sister city agreement with the town of Ohkuma in Futaba-gun, Fukushima Prefecture, on 25 March 1991, and over many years, they exchanged high school students. The Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant is located in Ohkuma and the town was devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake. On 11 March, to mark 10 years since the disaster and 30 years of sister city ties, a tree planting ceremony was held at Ohkuma Garden in Bathurst as a sign of hope for the continued revival of Ohkuma Town.

As I was attending the event in Sydney, Deputy Consul-General Tanaka attended the tree planting ceremony and planted a crepe myrtle tree with Cr Bobby Bourke, Mayor of Bathurst Regional Council. Despite the heavy rain, the city's key representatives took part and the warm regard that the people of Bathurst have for the people of Ohkuma was clearly evident.



**At the site of the tree planting ceremony in Ohkuma Garden  
with Bathurst Mayor Bobby Bourke and Mrs Fudeko Reekie  
(24 March 2021)**

The following week on 24 March, I visited Bathurst and exchanged greetings with many people involved in the sister city relationship, including Mayor Bourke, Cr Graeme Hanger - immediate past mayor, Cr Monica Morse - former mayor, and Mr David Sherley - General Manager of Bathurst Regional Council. Since the disaster, mutual visits have continued between Ohkuma and Bathurst, and I was moved to hear that during the visit to Japan in 2018, members of Bathurst Regional Council went to observe Ohkuma wearing personal protection equipment. During my visit to Bathurst, I was also kindly guided by Mayor Bourke and Mrs Fudeko Reekie around the city to see the Ohkuma Garden (where the tree planting ceremony that I was

unable to attend took place), as well as the National Motor Racing Museum next to Bathurst's famous Mount Panorama Racing Circuit and the Rail Museum which opened last year.

Mrs Fudeko Reekie worked at All Saints College in Bathurst from 1975 teaching Japanese for 35 years. Since 1991, when the sister city relationship between Ohkuma and Bathurst was formed, she supported exchange between them over many years, and even after receiving an Imperial Decoration from the Government of Japan in 2013 in recognition of her efforts, she has continued to contribute by writing about Bathurst and recording the history of sister city exchange in both Japanese and English. Until COVID broke out last year, approximately 20 high school students engaged in mutual exchange visits every year. Speaking with people on the ground in Bathurst, I became aware of the extent of her contribution.

On 25 March, an online event was held to renew the agreement on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sister city relationship between Ohkuma and Bathurst. I took part and greeted participants from Sydney. I hope that the sister city relationship between Bathurst Regional Council and Ohkuma Town will develop even further in the future.



**With NSW Minister for Police and Emergency Services David Elliott, Assistant Commissioner Robert McNeil, Rainbow Project Representative Hirano Yukiko and others at my official residence (18 March 2021)**

- **Communicating our gratitude for support and exchange activities in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake**

The week after the 11 March commemoration, I hosted a dinner at my official residence to convey the gratitude of the Government of Japan for support and exchange activities in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake. Among the guests were The Hon. David Elliott, NSW Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Mr Robert McNeil, Assistant Commissioner, Fire and Rescue NSW, Ms Hirano Yukiko, Rainbow Project representative, Mr Löeby Lovato, who produced the video screened at the Sydney commemoration, and Mr Peter Gibson, who acted as an MC at said commemoration. We discussed the various activities in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Minister Elliott was very knowledgeable about Japan, having observed the disaster-affected areas when he visited Japan in 2013, and he also visited Japan during the 2019 Rugby World Cup to watch a match. Assistant Commissioner McNeil has expertise in dealing with radiation, and he said that he felt, at the time of the rescue



operations, that radiation countermeasures were ideal, but that it was tremendously difficult to conduct search and rescue efforts in the extreme cold of the region. He felt the great significance of the Australian, Japanese and other international teams having done all their best under such severe conditions.



The team members behind the 10 year commemorative event for the Great East Japan Earthquake  
(11 March 2021 – photo courtesy Rainbow Project)

- **The importance of coming together**

Through my participation in this series of events I strongly felt the importance of coming together in difficult times and then going forward together.

The Great East Japan Earthquake was not only a time of trial for Tohoku but for all Japanese people. In response, Australians and Japanese living in Australia not only reached out and gave their support in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, they continued to engage in exchange with the affected area over the following 10 years and joined the people of Tohoku and Japan in walking the path to recovery. The bonds of trust between Japan and Australia have become even stronger as a result.

A friend in need is a friend indeed. While continuing to give thanks to everyone involved in the immediate support and the exchange that followed, I would like to do all I can to enable such friendship between our two countries to endure and thrive for the future.

Japan Club of Sydney (JCS) Rainbow Project and East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami 10th Commemoration

<https://jcsrainbow.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/JCSRainbow>

My opening remarks (11 March 2021)

[https://www.sydney.au.emb-](https://www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp/document/CGKiya_speeches/2021_10thGEJECommemorationRainbowProject.pdf)

[japan.go.jp/document/CGKiya\\_speeches/2021\\_10thGEJECommemorationRainbowProject.pdf](https://www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp/document/CGKiya_speeches/2021_10thGEJECommemorationRainbowProject.pdf)

Interview with Australian Urban Search and Rescue Leader Robert McNeil – Japanese (11 May 2011)

<https://wedge.ismedia.jp/articles/-/1329>

Sister city exchange between Bathurst Regional Council and Ohkuma Town, Fukushima Prefecture – this consulate's website

[https://www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr\\_en/sister\\_city.html#bathurst](https://www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/sister_city.html#bathurst)

Report on Mrs Fudeko Reekie receiving the Order of the Rising Sun, Silver Rays (2013 – Japanese only)

<https://www.jams.tv/uncategorized/51930>

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