

29 April 2022



With representatives of the local Lions Club and Rotary Club in front of the sister city *torii* gate at the Cooma Lions Park (21 April 2022)

Have you been to the Snowy Mountains? It is famous for having Australia's largest ski resort. In fact, the area also has connections with Japan thanks to many years of exchange with sister cities in Japan. Recently, I visited the Snowy Mountains for the first time. There I exchanged views about how to restart sister city exchange post-COVID and I also attended the unveiling of a sculpture by a Japanese artist.

In this issue of my newsletter, as I introduce recent developments in the Snowy Mountains and surrounding areas, and explain the areas' exchange with Japan, let us reflect on how such exchange may develop in the future.



At Queanbeyan Sister City Park (20 April 2022)

- **Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council and Minami Alps City**

On the first day of my trip, 20 April, I visited the city of Queanbeyan-Palerang which is located next to Canberra, Australia's capital city. In 2016, the City of Queanbeyan and Palerang Council merged to become Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council, but 30 years ago in 1992, the City of Queanbeyan formed a sister city relationship with Hatta Village in Yamanashi Prefecture. A lecture on 'Friendship and International Understanding between Australia and Japan' held at the time was the catalyst for establishing the agreement.

In 2003, Hatta Village merged with 5 other towns and villages to form Minami-Alps City, and soon afterwards in 2004, the sister city agreement with Queanbeyan was re-signed. In 2012, on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the original sister city affiliation, the mayor of Minami-Alps City visited Queanbeyan.

In Queanbeyan Sister City Park, there are various commemorative items including a nameplate recording the 1992 sister city agreement between Queanbeyan and Hatta, a monument donated by Minami-Alps city, and numerous commemorative trees planted by city and student delegations. I was greatly impressed to see the history of exchange over the years gathered in the park, but the most recent tree planting was in 2015.



**With councillors from Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council - the sister city relationship signing documents and gifts received from their sister city (20 April 2022)**

An exchange visit planned by Queanbeyan for 2016 was postponed due to the amalgamation in the same year. Since then, while reengagement and re-signing following the merger have been considered, to date this has not eventuated.

During my visit, I exchanged views with members of the city council and executive staff at the local government office where their council chamber is located. In display cabinets at the entrance of the council chamber, there are documents confirming the sister city relationship with Hatta Village and Minami-Alps City, as well as gifts received.

From the side of Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council, I received a strong message that they hope to overcome and realise a re-signing of the sister city agreement just as Hatta Village did when it became Minami-Alps City through a merger.

In 2019, Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council were preparing to send a delegation of representatives, however, it had to be postponed due to a mayoral election in Minami-Alps City in 2019 and since 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I was encouraged to hear their happy memories of previous visits to Hatta and Minami-Alps and I expect that exchange will resume very soon.



Visiting a Koala Sanctuary (21 April 2022)

- **Snowy Monaro Regional Council and Yamaga City and Kusatsu Town**

The following day (21 April), I travelled further south to visit Snowy Monaro Regional Council. Snowy Monaro Regional Council was established through a merger in 2016: the former shire of Cooma established a sister city relationship with Yamaga City in Kumamoto Prefecture in 1975 and the former shire of Snowy River had done the same with Kusatsu Town in Gunma Prefecture in 1991.

Of these, Cooma and Yamaga have continued their exchange by sending citizen and student delegations every other year since 2001. On the Cooma side, the Lions Club and Monaro High School have played a central role both sending and receiving delegations. During my visit, I was shown the sister city *torii* gate at the Cooma Lions Park (see photo, p.1). In 2019, Cooma sent a delegation to Yamaga City ([Cooma Yamaga Sister City Exchange Facebook](#)), but due to COVID-19, exchange has been postponed since 2020. I am pleased to know that online exchanges are planned for August this year, with actual visits resuming next year.

Snowy Monaro Regional Council was badly affected by the 2019-2020 bushfire disaster. During my visit, Mayor Narelle Davis kindly guided me to a koala sanctuary, where I received an explanation about the collaborative koala conservation and

breeding efforts by the [Two Thumbs Wildlife Trust](#) and [Australian National University \(ANU\)](#), and about the protection of young kangaroos and wombats by [Possumwood Wildlife](#) hospital. The passion of the representatives for their work was clear to see.



Field trip to Thredbo (22 April 2022)

The next day I was accompanied by Mayor Davis and council members to observe Thredbo, which is the largest ski resort in the Snowy Mountains. The gondolas and lifts were in operation during the off-season and were crowded with tourists enjoying the mountain biking and hiking. A new gondola was built two years ago to significantly increase passenger capacity, and they expect to be in full operation this winter as we overcome COVID.

From Thredbo, you can climb Mount Kosciusko (2,228m), Australia's highest mountain. As you might guess, we decided not to climb the mountain, but we took the lift up to the highest restaurant in Australia and had lunch while enjoying the wonderful view.

Agriculture and tourism are the mainstays of industry in Snowy Monaro, especially in winter, when far more tourists and seasonal workers stay in the area than there are residents. Looking out over the mountain range, blessed with fine weather, I imagined how lively the winter slopes must be.

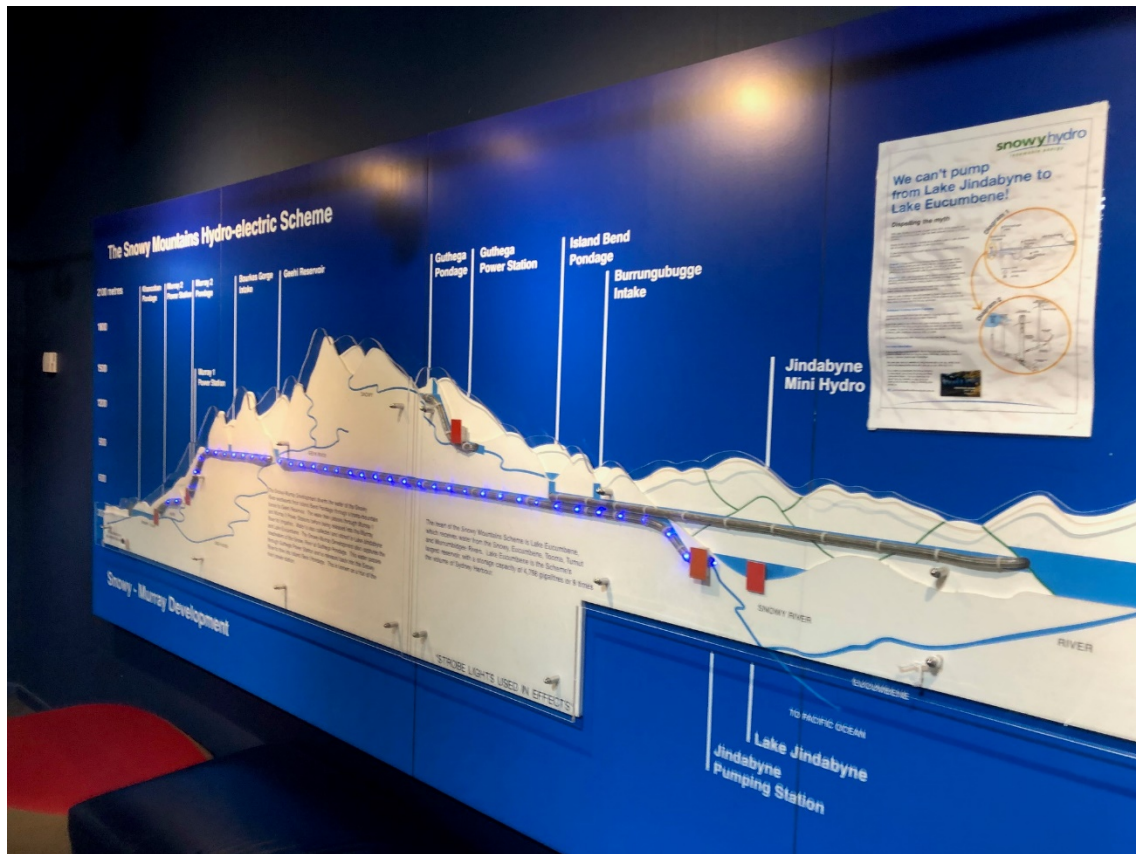


**Charles Davis Photography (22 April 2022)**

I was also taken to the photography gallery of Charles Davis, an award-winning photographer of animals and birds in the Snowy Mountain wilderness. He is the son of Mayor Narelle Davis.

Wombat parent and child walking through the snow, kookaburras sitting on branches huddled up to each other, highly-coloured birds against the snow – scenes such as these capturing the briefest of moments showed the natural splendour of the region.

My favourite photo was [“Big Step, Little Step”](#) and I bought an acrylic ornament as a souvenir. Which photo do you like? Please take a look on the [website](#).



Snowy Hydro Discovery Centre (21 April 2022)

The Snowy Mountains are home to huge hydroelectric and irrigation facilities. Under a national project called the Snowy Scheme, 16 large dams and seven hydroelectric power stations were built over a 25-year period from 1949 to 1974. The total construction cost was AUD 820 million and more than 100,000 workers from over 30 countries were mobilised. I visited the [Snowy Hydro Discovery Centre](#) to learn about its history.

In 2002, Snowy Hydro was established with NSW and Victoria holding shares (in 2018 shares were sold to the federal government), providing electricity stabilisation services in NSW, Victoria and South Australia, primarily using pumped hydro plants. In 2017, it was announced that new hydropower plants would be built as Snowy 2.0, and preparations for construction are currently underway. Snowy Hydro is becoming even more important as energy stability must be combined with the utilisation of renewable energy.

In October last year, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries was awarded a contract to supply turbines for Snowy Hydro's new gas-fired power station in the Hunter Valley. The turbines are not only the most efficient in the world but can also handle up to 30% hydrogen being co-fired. This is a typical example of how Japan-Australia business is contributing to decarbonisation.



**The international buffet at the Cooma Multicultural Centre  
(21 April 2022)**

The Snowy Hydro company employs engineers from all around the world, and as a result, there are many families with different cultural backgrounds living in Cooma. It is expected that this will increase in the future with the new Snowy 2.0 facilities.

The [Cooma Multicultural Centre](#) was established in order to support these families in their daily lives. During my visit, I was invited to take part in the centre's international buffet luncheon, and they explained the centre's activities to me.

It can be lonely for the spouses and children who accompany the international engineers who come to live in Cooma, and the centre becomes a "second home" for them, assisting them with day-to-day matters and searching for employment. How to set-up and use a bank account was written on a whiteboard in the centre. I felt that such initiatives are important for the functioning of a multicultural society.





**With Mrs Nichole Overall MP and her husband at the networking event organised by the Mayor of Snowy Monaro (21 April 2022)**

Mayor Davis of Snowy Monaro Regional Council kindly organised a networking event for people involved in sister city exchange and for those I would meet during my visit to the area; it took place on the first day of my visit at the Cooma Car Club. After introductions by the Mayor, I expressed my sincere gratitude to the people of the city for the many years of sister city exchange.

For the first time, I met Mrs Nichole Overall MP, newly elected in February this year to the NSW Legislative Assembly, and her husband, Mr Tim Overall, former mayor of Queanbeyan. She said she has good memories of visiting Japan with her whole family in 2009 when her husband was mayor of Queanbeyan, not only of being welcomed in the sister city of Minami-Alps, but also of touring around Japan.

I also met Mr Miyata Toshi, Chairman of [Monbeef](#), who is on secondment from [S Foods](#) in Japan. A beef processing company, Monbeef is currently preparing to restart operations at the plant this year, which was temporarily shut down due to soaring raw material prices. This consulate is committed to supporting Japanese companies such as these.



**At the unveiling ceremony with Snowy Valleys Mayor Ian Chaffey, Sculpture by the Sea Founder David Handley and Mr Ushio Keizo  
(22 April 2022)**

- Snowy Valleys Sculpture Trail

In the afternoon of 22 April, I travelled from Snowy Monaro to Snowy Valleys to attend the unveiling of a Japanese sculptor's work at the historic B&B Brigham House in Tooma. The event was part of the [Snowy Valleys Sculpture Trail](#), a new initiative by the organisation holding Sydney's famous [Sculpture by the Sea](#) exhibition. The trail is funded by the Bushfire Local Economic Recovery Fund in partnership with the local government.

Japanese sculptors have participated in Sculpture by the Sea since its inception in the late 1990s, and last May, a Japanese sculpture exhibition entitled "[Sculpture by the Rocks](#)" was held at the Rocks in central Sydney. The unveiling of the work by Japanese sculptor Ushio Keizo is part of the Snowy Valleys Sculpture Trail and occurred ahead of the trail's launch next month. The unveiling dinner was attended by about 30 people including Mr David Handley, founder of Sculpture by the Sea, Cr

Ian Chaffey, Mayor of Snowy Valleys Regional Council, other regional councillors, Mr Ushio Keizo and local residents, and they all enjoyed the meal prepared by the executive chef from Tetsuya's Restaurant.

The unveiling ceremony of the Japanese sculptor's work was an opportunity for Snowy Valleys Regional Council to consider the possibility of a sister city relationship with Japan. The Snow Valleys Sculpture Trail will consist of more than 20 sculptures – many will be works by Japanese sculptors. I would like to encourage not only Snowy Monaro Regional Council, but also Snowy Valleys Regional Council to further deepen its relationship with Japan.



“Oushi Zokei” by Ushio Keizo (23 April 2022)

- **Deep connections from sister city exchange**

The visit to the Snowy Mountains region reaffirmed for me that sister city exchanges create deeper connections with different dimensions than a simple sightseeing trip.

Reciprocal visits by sister cities establish structures for dialogue and ongoing exchange with the other side such as city-wide events and programs to host visiting

delegations by groups such as schools and business groups. The experience gained from this is far more profound than what is seen or heard as a tourist.

The recent situation in Ukraine makes me realise that in times of crisis what we can rely on is mutual trust. As Japan and Australia deepen their cooperation and interdependence in the future, in everything from security to economy and culture, deep ties at the local grassroots level will be a real asset for both countries.

In order to further deepen the relationship between the Snowy Mountains region and Japan in the future, I would like to share the outcome of my visit with many people and cherish the encounters I made along the way.

Kiya Masahiko, Consul-General of Japan in Sydney