

(Thank you, Ray, for that introduction.)

The Hon. Michael McCormack,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, I would like to congratulate Mr Mat McLachlan on realising the publication of his book, *The Cowra Breakout*.

As Consul-General of Japan in Sydney, the story of the Cowra Breakout is well known to me. And the town of Cowra and its people have a special place in the relationship between Japan and Australia.

Indeed, a former Ambassador of Japan to Australia called Cowra “the spiritual home of Japan-Australia relations”.

Earlier this month on 5 August, I attended a commemorative service for the 78th anniversary of the Cowra Breakout. It was my 4th visit to Cowra, and as on the previous 3 occasions, I received a warm welcome from everyone I met.

Let me share a quote:

“Two countries that were once at war with each other ended up becoming friends because of the kindness that happened in Cowra.”

These words are from the picture book *Jack's Visit to Cowra* by Lusi Austin, a Cowra resident, who wrote the book to explain the Breakout to her children. They are simple words, but they speak volumes about the role Cowra has played in Japan-Australia relations since the end of the war.

In fact, it was an act of kindness after the war that saw all graves of Japanese who died in Australia during the war to be moved to Cowra. Members of the Returned and Services League (RSL) Cowra sub-Branch looked after the cemetery for fallen Australian servicemen. At the same time they cared for the neighbouring graves of their former Japanese enemies. After receiving a report that the Japanese cemetery was being well maintained, the then Ambassador of Japan to Australia suggested that Cowra become the resting place of Japanese who died during the war. And so it came to be that in 1964, the Japanese War Cemetery was established by the Government of Japan in Cowra.

During the 70s and 80s, the people of Cowra engaged in ever more active exchange with Japan – the beautiful Cowra Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre was established – and the Cowra-Seikei High School Exchange Program has connected young people in both countries over 52 years. These ties flourish to this day.

My very first visit to Cowra in June 2020 made me realise that many people over many years have supported exchange in Cowra to achieve reconciliation between Australia and Japan.

I think it is important that everyone be aware of the history of reconciliation and exchange between Japan and Australia and that we work to build on this.

Japan and Australia look back together on our history – the Cowra Breakout, the bombing of Darwin and the attack on Sydney Harbour 80 years ago, and then the end of the war 77 years ago – and we offer our sincere condolences to the victims.

Whenever I have attended commemorative services in Cowra, Darwin or here in Sydney, I have renewed my determination to do my utmost so that Japan and Australia work together to build the future.

War is not some story from the distant past. Even today, there are wars taking place around the world including in Ukraine, and tensions are rising also in East Asia.

As we face these challenges, it is to be hoped that going forward, Japan and Australia show leadership and cooperate ever more closely for the peace and prosperity of the world.

Thank you.