

**National Day Reception on the occasion of His Majesty the Emperor's Birthday**

**22 February 2023**

- Your Excellency the Governor and Mr Wilson
- Chief Justice
- Ministers and Parliamentarians
- Distinguished Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

**1 Introduction**

Thank you all for joining me this evening to celebrate His Majesty the Emperor's birthday.

It is a tremendous honour to host this national day reception and to welcome so many friends of Japan and the Japan-Australia relationship.

Tomorrow, the 23rd of February, His Majesty will turn 63. I would like to take this opportunity to wish His Majesty continued good health.

**2 Visits to NSW reactivated after COVID**

Over the last year since COVID restrictions eased, official visits between Japan and NSW have reactivated and reinvigorated our bilateral relationship.

In July 2022, two Japanese ministers, Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Koichi Hagiuda, and Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications Yasushi Kaneko visited Sydney.

Also in July, NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet visited Japan – his first official overseas visit as premier. Choosing Japan as his first destination shows the importance of the Japan-NSW relationship.

Last month, LDP Secretary-General and former Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi, LDP Chairperson of the General Council Toshiaki Endo, and State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shunsuke Takei paid separate visits to Sydney.

And of course, both our prime ministers paid reciprocal visits during the past year.

We can see – ties in the political and business arenas are fully reactivating.

β Cultural relations with NSW being reactivated

I am happy to say this is also the case in the cultural arena.

I have attended a number of events that were long delayed due to COVID.

Sydney's new must-see landmark, the new building of the Art Gallery of NSW, opened in December, and I was fortunate to meet the Japanese architects responsible for the design – SANAA's Ms Kazuyo Sejima and Mr Ryue Nishizawa.

I would like to make special mention of the resumption of the Japanese language guided tours. I went on one of these tours, given by highly knowledgeable Japanese volunteer guides. One guide has been volunteering since 2003!

I have met so many Japanese living in Sydney who are contributing to this city's vibrant cultural life.

Another long postponed event was a wonderful performance in November by the Strathfield Symphony Orchestra conducted by artistic director, Dr Sadaharu Muramatsu, and featuring the Australian Chamber Orchestra's Ms Aiko Goto on violin.

I have also seen how traditional Japanese cultural practices such as ikebana and the tea ceremony have been embraced locally.

To the sporting field: Many Japanese are looking forward to the World Baseball Cup in Japan in March. Team Australia will be there. Women's Soccer World Cup matches will soon be played. Our friendly sporting rivalry creates so many people-to-people ties.

I know that in 2023 cultural and sport exchange will continue to flourish.

#### 4 Consul-General's activities

Exchange at the local level also fosters people-to-people ties which are such a strength of the Japan-Australia relationship.

The very day after I arrived in Sydney, I had the pleasure of visiting Cowra, a home of reconciliation and friendship between Japan and Australia.

And I have visited several local councils, including Bathurst, Dubbo and Campbelltown and seen sister-city exchange in action.

Beyond NSW, I have already been to the Northern Territory twice. Just two days ago, I arrived back from Darwin where I attended the Bombing of Darwin Commemorative Service.

On such occasions, I am reminded how far we have walked together along the path of reconciliation, exchange and cooperation to be the true friends and partners we are today.

#### 12 Conclusion

I look forward to the year ahead, confident that exchange and cooperation between Japan and Australia will continue to level up.

Of course, we should not take anything for granted.

I thank all of you gathered here this evening for your invaluable contributions to the Japan-Australia relationship, and I ask for your ongoing support.

Thank you.