

Letters and Essays from Sydney 2.0 – Volume 13

~ Discussions with the new state government begin ~

31 May

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Two issues ago (Vol. 11), I wrote about the inauguration of the new NSW state government led by Premier Chris Minns, as the Labor Party took power for the first time in 12 years after winning the New South Wales state election on 25 March.

Later, on 9 May, I attended the first sitting of the state parliament. Before the formal opening, the atmosphere in the chamber was relaxed and I saw the newly elected Premier Minns and former Premier Perrottet mixing with other members of parliament and smiling as they talked. The atmosphere changed when NSW Chief Justice Andrew Bell in his capacity as Lieutenant-Governor delivered the official opening speech and then solemn ceremonies took centre stage.

With the opening of parliament, the proper work of the new government could begin.

It was against this background that on 25 May, I had the opportunity to pay a courtesy call on Premier Minns.



After requesting a courtesy call, I am happy to say that in no time at all, we received a date for the meeting.

Furthermore, requests we had made separately to meet with individual cabinet ministers were arranged by the Premier's office to take place on the same occasion as the courtesy call on the Premier. As well as being efficient, it felt that there was a "one team" response to relations with Japan, and my colleague and I were warmly received. Also present at the courtesy call were Deputy Premier Prue Car (whose other portfolios include Western Sydney), Climate Change, Energy and the Environment Minister Penny Sharpe¹, Treasurer Daniel Mookhey, Minister for Multiculturalism and Sports Stephen Kamper¹, Industry and Trade Minister Anoulack Chanthivong¹. Other government staff were present, and with close to 10 people on the NSW Government side of the table and just myself and Vice-Consul TATENO Minako sitting on the Japan side, there was a certain asymmetry.

Throughout the entire courtesy call, the strongest impression was the character of Premier Minns – "open, friendly, frank and warm" are the perfect words. In addition, as discussions proceeded, I observed the Premier and Ministers exchanging comments in a very natural and friendly fashion, and I gained an impression of the unity of the team working under the leadership of Premier Minns.

From my side, in addition to congratulating Premier Minns on his inauguration and forming government, I mentioned the wide-ranging areas in which Japan and NSW collaborate – trade and economy, art and culture, sports and people-to-people exchange at the local level, such as sister cities. I also explained the importance of continuous and regular consultations between the NSW state government and Japanese companies and this consulate. Noting that cooperation between private and public sectors on the Japanese side has created a platform to exchange information in regard to Western Sydney development, I expressed my expectation that Japan-NSW cooperation would result in the realisation of concrete projects. I was encouraged to hear Premier Minns speak of the importance of the relationship with Japan and that NSW is always open to dialogue with Japanese companies.

I also emphasised that there are many Japanese people in NSW active in the arts and culture, and sports among others, and that people-to-people exchange such as sister-city exchange is flourishing. I expressed my hope that the members of the NSW state government would have the opportunity to meet "local Japanese engaged in such activities in NSW". I also requested their continued cooperation in ensuring the safety and security of the Japanese community which is the most important responsibility of a consulate-general.

In response to my comments, Premier Minns and other cabinet ministers replied in a very honest and straightforward manner, and they were very positive about NSW's relationship with Japan.

¹ Has additional portfolios to those listed here

By the way, during our conversation, I said that I would of course be barracking for the NSW Blues in the rugby league State of Origin series that was starting that week (in fact the first match was on the day I wrote this newsletter). I said that I believed the Blues would win, and I was also sure to appeal to the fact that one of the main sponsors of the NSW Waratahs in the rugby union Super Rugby Pacific is a Japanese company.

From start to finish, our discussions were very pleasant – friendly and productive.

Our exchange gave me the feeling that Japanese companies and the local Japanese community can expect to find fresh dynamism when collaborating and cooperating with the new NSW Government.

I renewed my desire to work together with the NSW Government led by Premier Minns towards our common goal of further developing Japan-NSW relations. The discussions on the day of the courtesy call were an important first step towards these shared objectives.



(Ends)