

Letters and Essays from Sydney 2.0 – Volume 18

~ At the start of the year ~

5 January

[Translation published 9 January]



I hope you were all able to celebrate a meaningful Christmas and the New Year.

In Japan, the year began sadly with the Noto Peninsula earthquake, which caused great damage, and the accident at Haneda Airport when two planes crashed. I would like to express my heartfelt sympathy to the people affected by the disasters and I pray for the souls of those who lost their lives. I would also like to express my gratitude for the kind messages of support that the Consulate received.

It is a year and three months since I assumed my position here in September 2022. When I arrived, I was deeply struck by how Sydney was returning to “normal mode” after the COVID pandemic. Then as 2023 unfolded, it seemed that the energy which had built up during the pandemic was released like magma and there was a true flourishing of events throughout the

year. I received so many requests to visit places. In particular, from mid-November to mid-December, there was a concentration of events, day after day, with no break between day and evening, to the point that I wished I could clone myself! Of course, some events overlapped and I had to decline some invitations – my apologies.

Throughout the year, it was encouraging to see Japan- and Japan-Australia related events held in diverse fields – the economy, academia and education, culture, art, sports, and regional exchange. There were also increased opportunities to meet with dignitaries. I am grateful for this.

If there is one regret, it would be that I was not able to welcome Japan's national women's soccer team "Nadeshiko Japan" to Sydney. As Honorary Patron of the Japan Football Association, Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado was also planning to visit New Zealand and Sydney, however, her visit was cancelled at the last moment due to her mother's passing. I am looking forward to seeing Nadeshiko Japan in action at the Summer Olympics in Paris this year.

A notable feature of last year was the strengthening of Japan-Australia security cooperation, and in line with this, there was a significant increase in the number of visits by representatives from Japan's Ministry of Defense and Self-Defense Forces. In addition to senior officials from the Ministry of Defense and Self-Defense Forces, many representatives from defence industries attended and exhibited at an international exhibition of defence equipment at the National Maritime Museum. Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's *JS Shiranui* made a port of call in Sydney when it participated in Exercise Malabar 2023, a joint exercise between Japan, Australia, India and the United States. At the reception held on board the *Shiranui*, the food and all the details were at such a high level – that's the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force!

Not only Japanese government representatives and members of parliament, but also local government delegations visited one after the other. This year, Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the state of New South Wales will mark the 40th anniversary of the establishment of their sister-state agreement. Tokyo Governor KOIKE Yuriko is scheduled to visit Sydney in early February.

In August, the 80th anniversary of the Cowra Breakout will be commemorated, and many guests involved in Japan-Australia friendship are expected to visit from Japan.

Turning to the situation in NSW, the housing supply shortage and the rising cost of living are pressing issues. It is against this background that I am proud to see how Japanese companies are contributing to easing the housing supply shortage through their activities in the housing sector and urban development. I would like to create opportunities to actively promote the activities and contributions of Japanese companies.

Once again this year, I look forward to working with you to further our Japan-Australia relationship. I intend to continue attending different events and will work hard to boost Japan's presence and profile. I ask for your ongoing support in 2024.

(Ends)