

A record of exchange as the Consul-General of Japan in Sydney (Edition 3)

～Visit to Darwin～

28 February

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From 18 to 20 February, I visited Darwin in the Northern Territory. There might be some people wondering why the Consul-General of Japan in Sydney took a 4½ hour flight from Sydney to Darwin, so allow me to explain. The Consulate-General of Japan in Sydney's jurisdiction covers both New South Wales and the Northern Territory. Moreover, the 19th of February 1942 is the day on which the first large-scale enemy attack on the Australian mainland occurred, namely, when the former Imperial Japanese Army bombed Darwin during the Second World War (through to November 1943, the Japanese forces bombed Darwin at total of 64 times). A memorial service is held annually in commemoration, and I visited Darwin for the first time in order to attend and lay a wreath at the memorial service.

In fact, the evening before my departure from Sydney, I was able to meet Mr James Paspaley, the Honorary Consul-General of Japan in Darwin, and I had the opportunity to be briefed about the ties between Japan and Darwin. Mr Paspaley is the Executive Director of Paspaley Pearls Group. One of the Northern Territory's major companies, Paspaley is Australia's largest pearling company and farms and harvests pearls in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. I was intrigued to know why such a person as Mr Paspaley was the Honorary Consul-General of Japan and so I looked into the history of his company's connections with Japan. I learnt that it is a company with deep connections with Japan; for example, since the 1950s, a time when anti-Japanese sentiment was still strong, the company has been employing Japanese experts in pearl production. Furthermore, when checking the Northern Territory homepage, I learnt that from the beginning of the 1900s until the outbreak of war in the Pacific, around 4,000 Japanese were involved in pearl harvesting and production. This type of exchange was interrupted by the war. I went to Darwin wanting to use my all-too-brief three days to learn as much as I could about post-war reconciliation and the current relationship of exchange between Japan and Australia.

On my first evening in Darwin, 18 February, I attended the Mess Dinner Commemoration of the I-124 which was hosted by the Commander of the Royal Australian Naval Base HMAS Coonawarra. In the month before the Bombing of Darwin, on 20 January 1942, the I-124 submarine engaged with the Royal Australian Navy mine sweeper HMAS Deloraine and the submarine was sunk and the 80 crew perished. It was the first time that the Royal Australian Navy hosted this commemorative dinner event; Ambassador Suzuki was invited as the Guest of Honour, and I also had the honour of attending. While reflecting on past events and expressing his respect to Northern Territory representatives involved in dealing with the submarine, the Ambassador mentioned the importance of Japan-Australia defence

cooperation and the recent increase in cooperation between the Japan Self Defense Forces and the Australian Defence Forces. Furthermore, he stated that 80 years ago at the end of the war, no-one then could have imagined today's close security cooperation between Japan and Australia, a sentiment that was also strongly felt by other attendees.



The following day on 19 February, the Ambassador and I attended the USS Peary Memorial Service and we each laid a wreath. Organised by the Australian-American Association of the Northern Territory Inc., the ceremony commemorates the USS Peary which was sunk on the day of the Bombing of Darwin. Also in attendance were the Hon. Richard Marles MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, and His Honour Professor the Honourable Hugh Heggie AO, PSM, Administrator of the Northern Territory, together with dignitaries from the United States. Ambassador Suzuki represented the Government of Japan and gave a speech in which he remembered the victims. Also in his speech, he referred to the Japanese, US and Australian defence ministers laying wreaths at the cenotaph in Darwin in November last year when they visited Darwin to attend the Japan-US-Australia Trilateral Defence Ministers' Meeting. He mentioned the post-war reconciliation process and the importance of people-to-people ties as part of that process, as well as the deepening Japan-Australia defence cooperative relationship.

After the USS Peary Memorial Service, the attendees walked to the location of the 83rd Bombing of Darwin Day Commemoration, held by the City of Darwin. Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Marles also spoke at this ceremony. While remembering the victims, he also noted the presence of Ambassador Suzuki and mentioned the fact that the November 2024 visit to Darwin was the first ever by a Japanese Defense Minister, and the

Deputy Prime Minister's comment regarding Japan-Australia relations, that former enemies had become the firmest of friends, left an extremely strong impression on me. Afterwards, Ambassador Suzuki, US Consul-General Tribble and I laid wreaths.



Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, the Hon. Lia Finocchiaro

I had the pleasure of meeting the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, the Hon. Lia Finocchiaro, at the above-mentioned Mess Dinner Commemoration in the evening of 18 February. The Chief Minister is a young and energetic leader, who I found to be so approachable that I didn't soon realise she was someone as important as the Chief Minister. The Chief Minister attended all of the ceremonies mentioned earlier in this newsletter, and she also hosted a reception to conclude the series of events. In her remarks at the concluding reception, the Chief Minister said that a lesson from the Bombing of Darwin 83 years ago was that the Northern Territory is at the frontline of Australia's defence and that getting through the series of Bombings of Darwin was the price of protecting democracy. Noting that since 2012 US marine forces have been stationed in the Territory, she stated that if you look at recent defence cooperation with Japan, as clearly evident by the visit by Minister Nakatani in November 2024 which was the first ever visit to Darwin by a Japanese defense minister, the democratic nation of Japan has become a close friend of Australia in the post-war period, not only in economic terms but also in strategic relations. She noted that the day's ceremonies were a valuable opportunity to reaffirm this and the fact that the Northern Territory is an important keystone in the Indo-Pacific region. I was deeply impressed by her remarks.

After the reception, I paid a courtesy call on the Chief Minister. During our discussions, she said that the Ichthys Project by Japanese company INPEX has had a large economic effect

on the Northern Territory. She also mentioned that every other day from the verandah of her office located next to Darwin Harbour, she spots a cargo vessel shipping LNG etc from the Ichthys Project and this makes her feel the depth of the ties with Japan. In addition to this, the Northern Territory is rich in critical minerals resources, and there is also great potential in carbon capture and storage (CCS) and hydrogen business, and the Chief Minister expressed her strong expectation for further expansion by Japanese companies in the Northern Territory. Indeed, the Northern Territory Government has great expectations for Japan and it is certainly hoped that economic ties with Japan will deepen further.



Darwin Memorial Uniting Church

Up to this point, I have mentioned the battle 83 years ago involving the I-124 submarine and the Bombing of Darwin which is symbolic of the hostilities between Japan and Australia, and that in the 80 years since the end of the war, our ties have developed into the close relationship we share today. However, anti-Japanese sentiment did not immediately improve after the war, and earlier I touched on the fact that when Paspaley brought over Japanese pearling experts in the 1950s anti-Japanese sentiment was severe. In this context, one story that must be told is that of the Fujita Salvage Company which recovered shipwrecks from Darwin Harbour from 1959 to 1961.

Fujita Salvage was engaged to recover shipwrecks which were impeding navigation along the Darwin coast, but at the time the salvage work began, the people of Darwin were very hostile towards Japan. As each shipwreck was raised and brought on to the shore, the technical skill and the determined efforts of Fujita Salvage contributed greatly to change such perceptions. Furthermore, when the Darwin Memorial Uniting Church was established in 1960, the CEO of the company, Mr Ryugo Fujita, donated 77 crosses made of metal salvaged from shipwrecks – the number 77 being how many times according to the Gospel

of Matthew in the New Testament that we must forgive the sins of someone who has done wrong unto us. Fujita Salvage did not simply raise shipwrecks; it contributed to Japan-Australia reconciliation.

I also visited this church where Ms Lauren Merritt kindly guided me around and showed me the 77 crosses and the propeller from a shipwreck which had been used as a tombstone and which was donated at the time of the 75th anniversary of the Darwin Bombing by family members of Mr Ryugo Fujita. I realised the giant footprint left behind by Mr Fujita.



Australian-Japanese Association of the NT (AJANT)

My guide around the Darwin Uniting Memorial Church, Ms Lauren Merritt, is also a member of the Australian-Japanese Association of NT (AJANT), which was founded in 1989 to promote friendship and mutual understanding between Japan and the Northern Territory. It was AJANT which in 2017 erected the memorial to the crew of the I-124 submarine on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of its sinking. The memorial was erected with financial support by the Northern Territory Government and Australian Department of Defence. The memorial is a short distance from the city, and Ms Janet Truong, President of AJANT, kindly accompanied me to the memorial and I laid a wreath in memory of the 80 crew who lost their lives.

Afterwards I had the opportunity to talk with AJANT members. Perhaps it is because there are around 400 Japanese nationals living in the NT, the majority of members are not people who have moved from Japan but are people who are interested in Japan. I was impressed to learn that it was these members who volunteer during their free time to

introduce Japanese culture through events such as Japanese festivals or film festivals. Thinking of the positive profile Japan has in Darwin, I think there is further scope to raise awareness of Japanese culture. I would like to thank AJANT for their activities to date and the Consulate intends to do all it can to support AJANT activities going forward.



A field trip to INPEX's Ichthys Project

As in the Chief Minister's remarks referred to earlier, the Ichthys Project by INPEX has benefitted the local economy and its presence is particularly noticeable. The project supplies around 8% of Japan's annual LNG imports, and given the project's significant role in supplying energy to Japan, I went to observe it on the final day of my visit (20 February). The location is a 40 to 50 minute trip by car from the centre of Darwin. As flammable materials are handled there, I changed into work gear, surrendered my mobile phone and

electronics, and listened carefully to a safety induction. Then I was allowed onsite where set over an enormous area there was a series of giant structures such as an LNG tank and power generators, and I was able to observe LNG being loaded onto an LNG tanker. These LNG tankers leave port on average once every three days. Thus, in addition to LNG, tankers carrying LPG and condensate also leave the port; the Chief Minister's observation that she sees tankers coming and going to the project every other day is well made indeed. I also learnt about plans for decarbonisation in the near future. This is a project which entailed an enormous investment in excess of 40 billion US dollars, and such a large-scale project would never have been realised without the strong relationship of trust between Japan and Australia that enables long-term reliable management.



The Northern Territory is more than three times the size of Japan in terms of surface area, but the size of its population is small at around 260,000 people. Set against this, Japan's presence in the economy and in the area of defence is quite large. I also realised the importance going forward of strengthening cooperation between Japan and the Northern Territory in these areas, while also deepening exchange and understanding of Japanese culture, in order to strengthen ties between Japan and the Northern Territory. The Consulate-General of Japan in Sydney would like to contribute its know-how to promoting cooperation with the Northern Territory.