

Letters and Essays from Sydney 2.0 – Edition 4

~ My first trip to Darwin ~

17 November

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From 10 to 13 November, I visited Darwin in the Northern Territory. The Consulate-General of Japan in Sydney has jurisdiction over the Northern Territory as well as New South Wales where Sydney is located. It was my seventh week since arriving in Australia.

The 4½ hour flight from Sydney made me realise the enormous scale of this country. And then, on arrival at the airport, the humid heat struck me. The temperature: 35 degrees. The humidity: 80%. It was so different to Sydney, but I instantly felt a sense of nostalgia – it was as though I had returned to my hometown in Kochi Prefecture.



As it was my first visit, I had set myself three goals: (1) self-introductions and studying the local environment, (2) commemoration and reconciliation efforts, and (3) supporting those involved in exchange.

Let me begin with (1) introductory calls and understanding the local environment. Her Honour the Honourable Vicki O'Halloran AO, Administrator of the Northern Territory (a position which corresponds to a state governor), has an aura about her, and I was encouraged to learn that she has experience of exchange with Japan. Deputy Chief Minister Nicole Manison briefed me about the economic situation and future targets, energy, critical minerals, hydrogen, tourism, and agriculture among others, and she spoke with great energy as she switched smoothly between discussing the NT's current

circumstances and its potential. She is a great female leader with many years ahead of her. Lord Mayor Kon Vatskalis impressed me as a broad-minded politician, and he told me of his strong expectations that exchange with Japan would revive, particularly student exchange, as we overcome or learn to live alongside COVID. Opposition Leader Lia Finocchiaro is another outstanding female leader and she discussed local issues with me frankly.



The NT Government kindly arranged detailed briefings for me over 3 separate sessions: an overview of the Northern Territory; various investment opportunities; and energy resources focussing on gas and critical minerals. All three briefings were excellent presentations with clear messaging. In fact, the presentations themselves also served as good examples of how to deliver PR activities.

Everyone I met in Darwin spoke with pride about INPEX's Ichthys LNG project. It is one of the world's largest offshore LNG production facilities. Not only is it the largest investment by a single Japanese company, INPEX has become an integral part of the local community, and its corporate behaviour and CSR activities are highly regarded. I visited INPEX headquarters and received a briefing about the project. I marvelled again at its scale when I noticed that this single project is the equivalent of all Russian exports to Japan. At the same time, I felt proud as a Japanese national of the wonderful CSR by a Japanese company.



Next, (2) commemoration and reconciliation. Darwin was bombed 64 times by aircraft of the Imperial Japanese Navy during the Second World War. This fact is little known in Japan. Even in Australia, people have only begun to talk about it relatively recently, and I have been told that for many people it is “unknown history”. At the Darwin Military Museum, I received a detailed explanation about the Bombing of Darwin from the museum director, Dr Norman Cramp.

The firm foundation of today’s Japan-Australia relationship is thanks to the post-war reconciliation efforts of those who came before us. The exchange between the Uniting Church and Fujita Salvage is an important example of this. Fujita Salvage was engaged in the removal of sunken vessels that were hindering navigation off the shore of Darwin, and the company donated 77 crosses made from salvaged metal to the Uniting Church. Pastor Lauren Merrit told me that the 77 crosses are a reference to a passage in the Bible, “How many times shall I forgive the sinner his crime? Seven times?” “You should forgive 77 times.” (in other words, without limit).

In the last World War, the Japanese submarine “I-124” was sunk off the coast of Darwin. All 80 crew members lost their lives and to this day remain where they perished. During my visit, I laid a wreath at the I-124 memorial. I also heard for the first time from NT Heritage about their project to use divers to create a 3D model of the I-124. I also visited and laid a wreath at the graveyard where Japanese who lived around the year 1900 are buried. There are tens of Japanese tombstones there, and many of the people seem to have been involved in the fishing industry.



I was in Darwin on 11 November – Remembrance Day. During the First World War, Japan and Australia fought together as allies, and the Japanese battleship *Ibuki* escorted ANZAC troops across the Indian Ocean. I was the only consul-general to have the opportunity to participate in this solemn Remembrance Day Service.



And finally, we come to (3) supporting those involved in exchange. The Australian-Japanese Association of the Northern Territory (AJANT) is very actively engaged in exchange with Japan. They have my sincere gratitude, and I would like to do all I can to champion AJANT in their activities. AJANT is planning to hold “Japan Festival” in the first half of next year, and with the cooperation of the Consulate-General of Japan in Sydney and other related organisations, I would like to support them in this undertaking. Compared to a population of 5 million in the Sydney metropolitan area, the NT’s population of 250,000 is small, but I realised that the people involved in exchange in the NT are just as passionate and share the same friendship for Japan as people all around Australia.



My next visit will probably be in February. The Bombing of Darwin Day Commemorative Service on 19 February is an important day for the Northern Territory and for the Consulate-General. I left Darwin vowing to return soon.

(As a sidenote, I arrived back in Sydney on Sunday evening, and the next day I went to Canberra on a two-day business trip, which meant that I was away from Sydney for some time. On Wednesday 16 November, I was back to my Sydney-based activities and straight into meetings with an influential city councillor, the NSW police commissioner and the secretary of the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet. This weekend, 19 and 20 November, I am visiting Dubbo to attend a series of sister-city events. I intend to write about the benefits of sister-city relationships in the next (5th) edition of *Letters and Essays from Sydney 2.0*.)

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