

Speech
Presented by Mr NAITO Yasushi, Consul-General of Japan in Perth
On the occasion of the New Year's Celebration Reception
at the Consul-General's Official Residence
Wednesday 22 January 2025

1 Acknowledgements

I wish to start by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting, the Wadjak people of the Noongar Nation, and pay my respect to their elders, past, present and emerging.

- The Hon Sue Ellery MLC, Minister for Finance; Commerce; Women's Interests; Representing the Premier of Western Australia,
- His Excellency Richard Court AC, Former Ambassador to Japan and Former Premier of Western Australia,
- The Hon David Johnston, Former Minister for Defense,
- Professor Clare Pollock, Vice Chancellor, ECU,
- His Worship the Mayor Logan Howlett, City of Cockburn,
- Her Worship the Mayor Deb Hamblin, City of Rockingham,
- Mr Sam Walsh, External Director of Mitsui & CO, former CEO of Rio Tinto,
- Mr Patrick Gregg, CEO of Austal
- Mr Tack Nakao, Chairperson of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Perth and General Manager Perth Office Mitsui & CO Australia
- Leaders of the Japanese and Australian business sectors,
- Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

2 Opening Remarks

Welcome to the New Year's celebration, co-hosted with the Japanese Chamber of Commerce & Industry in Perth. I hope you all had a good rest and an enjoyable time with your families over the New Year.

As you made your way up the path, you would have seen in the garden the *mochitsuki*, a traditional Japanese method of making *mochi* rice cake by pounding and turning glutinous rice with a mortar and wooden mallets. We usually do this in preparation for the New Year to wish for a good harvest and prosperity for the family and community, with rice signifying a source of vitality. Using the *mochitsuki* is an opportunity to bring the community together and for grown-ups to teach children about traditional culture, traditional food and teamwork while having fun.

We considered doing it inside this year, however, the mortar, *usu* is perhaps too heavy for this heritage building and perhaps a little too risky for our VIP guests, so we decided to stick with the sake barrel breaking ceremony, which you will see later.

3 AJBCC/JABCC Joint Conference in Perth

In October last year, we had the exciting announcement at the Australia-Japan Business Co-operation

Committee Joint Conference in Nagoya that the next AJBCC/JABCC Joint Conference would be held in Perth, the first time in 17 years. We anticipate some 600 top business leaders from Japan and Australia will gather here in Perth to discuss the common challenges of our future.

I had the honor of accompanying HE the Governor of Western Australia, the Hon Chris Dawson, to the joint conference where he made the announcement and we look forward to the opportunities that will arise from the 2025 AJBCC Conference on the 5th to 7th of October in Perth.

Thus, 2025 will be a year when the Japan-WA relationship receives special attention, both in Japan and Australia. We would like to capitalize on this opportunity to further advance investment, trade and bilateral relations for the benefit of both countries.

4 ANA Direct Flight

Another breakthrough last year was the resumption of the ANA Perth to Tokyo direct flight which now operates year round. After a five month pause, the direct flight resumed just in time for the Nagoya meeting and we have already seen an increase in business missions to Perth which we expect to further boost interactions and positive impacts on investment and trade.

In 2024, the number of Australian visitors to Japan broke the previous record in 2019, and with Japan hosting the Osaka Kansai Expo from April to October, we are expecting one million Australians to visit Japan this year.

As the Deputy Premier, the Hon Rita Saffioti, announced in December, Perth will host the FIFA World Cup Qualifier, where the Socceroos will face Samurai Blue on June 5, attracting a massive crowd of Australian and Japanese soccer fans to OPTUS Stadium. By the way, OPTUS Stadium maintenance firm was joined by Marubeni and it was another important breakthrough last year. I am meeting representatives from the national team next month to discuss how we can make the most of this exciting sporting event.

I have also met two top professional players who recently joined Perth Glory, Yuto Misao 三竿雄斗 from Kyoto Sanga 京都サンガ and Takuya Okamoto 岡本拓也 from Shonan Bellmare 湘南ベルマーレ, who will certainly do their part in raising the hype for the qualifiers.

5 Security Cooperation

Turning to security issues, as the security environment of the Indo-Pacific Region becomes ever more contested, it stands to reason that countries such as ours, which share values and key strategic interests, have grown even closer in upholding a free and open Indo-Pacific and the rules-based order.

Japan and Australia have collaborated in over 30 bilateral and multilateral defense exercises in the last fiscal year. As we face more pressing security challenges, allies of the USA, Australia and Japan require high levels of interoperability, with the Government of Japan identifying defense industry cooperation as a key priority.

We have envisioned the possibility of shipbuilding in Western Australia as an important opportunity

for collaboration that could widen the scope of economic and security collaboration, thereby uplifting our “special strategic partnership”. This partnership is more important than ever, especially in the current tough and increasingly unpredictable environment.

Delegations from Japanese industries such as Mitsubishi Heavy Industry, IHI and others are frequently visiting Perth following the Indian Ocean Defense and Security Conference. In fact, Mr Nakamura of IHI is with us today. As both MHI and IHI have advanced industrial capabilities for producing green hydrogen and ammonia on a commercial scale and are both active in the Space industry, they have every reason to establish a strategic base in Western Australia.

We are working hard to see a big breakthrough this year in relation to the general-purpose frigate program of Royal Australian Navy.

6 Reflecting on 2024

We had a number of 50th year milestones last year. The City of Perth and Kagoshima City celebrated 50 years of the sister city relationship, materializing mutual visits of their mayors. Tokyu Corporation and joint ventures celebrated 50 years of the Yanchep Two Rocks Project in the same year the Yanchep Rail Extension was completed thanks to the WA Government.

And the Australia-Japan Society of Western Australia (AJSWA) celebrated a 50 year milestone and achieved substantial financial support from INPEX for JECCWA, the Japan Education and Culture Center of Western Australia, that was launched last year succeeding the former Hyogo Center.

Thus, 2024 was the year to appreciate the efforts of our predecessors for bridging Japan and Western Australia with partnerships that have remarkably sustained and advanced for half a century and with a commitment to continue for a further 50 years.

7 Energy Cooperation

Japan and Western Australia have launched a number of iconic mega projects that has enabled the remarkable development of our two economies, changed the lives of many people and contributed to the world economy, that includes Robe River, Roy Hill, Ichthys, North West Shelf and others.

With the strong leadership of the WA Premier, the Hon Roger Cook, mega projects, such as Scarborough and Browse, are advancing firmly. Japan welcomes the decision by the WA Government to grant environmental approval for the North West Shelf Project Extension. We are looking forward to steadfastly advancing energy cooperation for the benefit of our two countries, for the region, for energy security as well as for decarbonization.

7 Exciting 2025

Henceforth, 2025 is an exciting year for Japan and Western Australia. We wish to maximize the opportunity of the joint business conference in October. ANA has already increased to two return flights and a lot more preparations will be made.

The Perth Japan Festival on March 15 will showcase performances by the Kanto Daiichi High School

Barbie's Cheerleaders that have won at world championships. The JS Icebreaker Shirase will again host on board receptions in April and we hope other vessels such as the Mogami type will visit WA soon. We are full of excitement for the inspiring opportunities 2025 will bring.

8 Conclusion

In conclusion, I was struck by two things that I knew would come and did happen the day before yesterday. One was a series of executive orders that have impacts on the world governance.

The other was official instructions from Tokyo. I am leaving Perth for Pretoria at the end of February. My new posting as Minister Counselor at the Embassy of Japan in South Africa is my fourth assignment in South Africa, which will host G20 this year.

Since arriving in Perth in October 2022, two weeks before the visit of Prime Minister Kishida, my work as Consul-General of Japan in Perth has allowed me to make countless fond memories and has been one of the greatest experiences of my life.

We are so humbled by the special bonds of friendship with Japan seen at all levels in Western Australia, built over many years that support the strong bilateral relationship between Japan and Australia. I wish to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt gratitude for the support you have extended to me and my wife during my tenure.

My successor will arrive in April and I hope he too will enjoy the wonderful friendship and support you have shown to me. My Deputy, Mr HASEGAWA will serve as Acting Consul-General of Japan in the meantime. We still have one month and we will still have many opportunities, allow me to take this opportunity to say thank you for your wonderful friendship.

End