

Speech
Presented by NAITO Yasushi, Consul -General of Japan in Perth
At the farewell event hosted by the Australia-Japan Society of Western Australia
Thursday February 20, 2025

Mr Ben Wholagan, President of the Australia Japan Society of Western Australia
Members of AJSWA,

Thank you for hosting this event in honour of my wife Harumi and myself. For the past 2 years and 5 months, we were so fortunate to have served in Western Australia during a time when human interactions expanded drastically after pandemic, starting from the visit of Prime Minister Kishida to Perth, the visit of then-Premier Mark McGowan to Japan, visit of Premier Roger Cook to Japan, and the resumption of the ANA Perth to Narita direct flight which is now operating all year along.

Last year, we were able to celebrate the 50 year anniversary of AJSWA and at the same time celebrated the launch of the Japan Education and Cultural Center of Western Australia (JECCWA) having a difficult transition from the Hyogo Center. We commend Ben-san and the executive members for their efforts in sustaining this beautiful institution as the basis of activities for cultural and educational ambassadors in Perth.

During my tenure, I met so many people who are bridging Japan and Australia. I am humbled to see the strong human bonds at all levels in Western Australia, that were built over many years. Human bonds are the most important asset we share between Japan and Western Australia.

I acknowledge, Tac Nakao, General Manager of Mitsui & Co Perth Office who is with us today. Just yesterday, Mitsui & Co made an announcement of a huge investment amounting to 8 billion dollars, the biggest ever investment of Mitsui on a single project. And that is to the world's biggest iron ore deposit in Western Australia. That is a testament to Japan's confidence in Western Australia.

Last year, a remarkable 920,000 Australians visited Japan, 50% more than previous year. And that is a record all-time high. The biggest breakthrough for WA was the resumption of the ANA direct flight now operating all year along. And with Osaka Kansai Expo from April to October, well over one million Australians are expected to visit Japan the year.

Here in Perth, we also have the Australia Japan Business Cooperation Committee Joint Business Conference planned on 5-7 October in Perth, the first time in 17 years. We also have the FIFA World Cup Qualifier at OPTUS on 5 June, and the Perth Japan Festival on 15 March. As this is the year the importance of the Japan-Western Australia relations receives special attention, we wish to make the most of it.

I am happy to announce on this occasion that a donation of Japanese books by Japan Foundation is materialized and will arrive at JECCWA soon. The books were chosen by JECCWA and organized by Mr Hara.

I wish to add that Mr Noel Hara, the Head of Information and Culture Section of the Consulate, who is present here today, is also leaving Perth very soon. Mr Hara, as you all know made close collaborations with AJSWA organizing cultural events and leaves behind many legacies. Please meet his successor, Ms Eri Hiroshima.

In concluding, I wish to once again convey our heartfelt gratitude to everyone here and members of AJSWA for all the support to my wife and myself during the tenure. I hope you could extend the same wonderful friendship you have shown to us to my successor who is arriving early April.

I wish the further development of AJSWA and JECCWA.

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