

Good evening.

Thank you for coming tonight to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Many of you will distinctly recall the moment when you first found out about the disaster. Where you were, what you were doing, and how you felt. I remember on 11 March 2011, I was in Jakarta, working at the Embassy of Japan. We had been preparing for a major international disaster drill: the ASEAN Regional Forum Disaster Relief Exercise, scheduled that year from 15 to 17 March in Manado, Indonesia. On 11 March, some Japanese rescue teams with rescue dogs had arrived in Jakarta to prepare for the drill. At the breaking news, they immediately had to return to Japan to deal with the real-life disaster. I remember requesting JAL, ANA and Garuda to provide a flight to Japan for the teams as early as possible.

Australia proved itself a true friend of Japan in the aftermath of the disaster with its swift and generous help, and Japan will never forget it. The Australian government sent a search and rescue team to Miyagi Prefecture, and a Royal Australian Air Force aircraft to transport much-needed personnel, vehicles and supplies. Australia's then-Prime Minister Julia Gillard was the first foreign leader to visit the quake-hit area in Japan after the disaster. The Victorian government, led by then-Premier Ted Baillieu, donated 2 million dollars. Moreover, ordinary Australians donated 10 million dollars to Japan through the Australian Red Cross Japan and Pacific Disaster Appeal.

In the 10 years since the Great East Japan Earthquake, recovery and reconstruction has come a long way. The number of evacuees has reduced from over 470,000 just after the disaster to around 41,000 as of February this year. 94% of disaster-affected farmland has recovered, and 97% of fishery processing facilities have reopened. Evacuation orders have been lifted in nearly all of Fukushima Prefecture excluding the Difficult-to-Return Zone. The first event of the Tokyo Olympic Games will be held at Azuma baseball stadium in Fukushima on 21 July this year: a Japan vs Australia softball game! And there is not only recovery, but even innovation such as the world's largest-scale hydrogen production facility using electricity generated by solar panels, which opened in Fukushima in March last year.

Our world's current disaster, the global COVID-19 pandemic, has forced us to use technology more to maintain our important international ties. However, real-world visits can never be replaced, and when the pandemic has subsided I hope for as many Australians as possible to visit Japan again.

Thank you.