

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this year's Emperor's Birthday Reception in honour of the 62nd Birthday of the Emperor of Japan, His Majesty Emperor Naruhito. I would like to thank all of you for being here this evening. It's wonderful that we can all meet face-to-face this time!

Although there have been several lockdowns since I arrived, I have had the opportunity to meet many people involved in the Victoria-Japan relationship, both in-person and virtually. Technology has played a huge role in keeping communication going over the last two years, but it cannot replace the merits of face-to-face communication.

2021 was a challenging year for everyone. Throughout this difficult period, the Japan-Australia relationship grew even stronger. The Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games were successfully held in Japan. A video posted by the Australian women's softball team who were the first to arrive in Japan - eased the concerns of many representatives who were on their way over. It was also wonderful to see Australia take many medals, particularly in the swimming.

It didn't take me long after I arrived to realise the importance of sport in Melbourne. I think every single person I met in my first few months asked me which AFL team I was planning to support. I'm going to use my diplomatic training here and not answer that question in my speech as I don't want anyone to leave before the end.

Prime Minister Kishida assumed his position in October 2021, and has been in regular contact with Prime Minister Morrison ever since, symbolising the strong ties between Japan and Australia. I hope that Prime Minister Kishida will be able to make a visit to Australia this year.

Australia is Japan's closest partner in Asia, and only a few weeks ago both leaders virtually signed the Reciprocal Access Agreement. This will pave the way for an enhanced contribution by Japan and Australia to the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region; and will further strengthen cooperation between our defence forces

Cooperation amongst the Quad - and I'm not talking about the horse racing 'Quaddie' here - is also increasingly important from the perspective of Indo-Pacific security. The recent Foreign Minister's meeting in Melbourne demonstrated the unity that exists between the four countries.

There are many notable events coming up in my states of responsibility: Victoria, South Australia, and Tasmania.

For example, in Victoria, liquefied hydrogen produced as part of the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain Pilot Project is now being transported to Japan. Last month, the world's first liquefied hydrogen carrier ship, the *Suiso Frontier*, departed the Port of Hastings for Kobe in Japan. The hydrogen in this project comes from brown coal in the Latrobe Valley. The project is now aiming to transition from the demonstration stage into the commercialisation stage. We appreciate continued support from both Federal and State Government levels.

In Tasmania, the *Umitaka Maru*, a training and research vessel of the Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology, was due to visit Hobart as part of a survey trip to Antarctica last month. Unfortunately the visit has been postponed due to COVID-19, however we hope the vessel will return soon and that Hobart will become a gateway to the Antarctica for Japan in the future.

In South Australia, a Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry will be established in Adelaide in April due to the increase of Japanese companies operating there.

I have already made eight trips to South Australia and three to Tasmania. Last year, we took the new Japanese Toyota Mirai 2 vehicle, powered by hydrogen, to Government House in all three states. It was wonderful to see this technology being embraced at such a high level.

In addition to promoting cooperation in hydrogen, I am looking forward to seeing further growth between Australia and Japan across space, defence, cyber security, and medical technology and so on. I also hope we can see expanded trade and investment between Victoria and Japan throughout the year.

I strongly hope that the pandemic will soon end and international travel between Japan and Australia will resume so that we can see more people-to-people connections between our two countries.

I hope you will enjoy the rest of the evening and that you will continue all of your hard work to support the Australia-Japan relationship throughout the year. Thank you.