

Good evening, こんにちは。

Thank you everyone for being here this evening to welcome 13 JET Programme participants who have completed the JET Programme in Japan and returned to Victoria recently.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone here for your continued assistance to the JET Programme and your support in strengthening the Japan-Australia relationship. Particularly, I would like to thank Mr Murray McLean AO, a former Australian Ambassador to Japan, for his attendance tonight and his continued warm support for the Japan-Australia relationship. Thank you, Murray-san.

I would also like to thank the Hon. Natalie Hutchins, the Minister for Education, for sending a heart-warming message to the returned JET participants. Her message will be shown right after my speech.

I would like to say to the returned JETs, welcome back home. お疲れ様でした。 I believe that all of you came back from Japan with a lot of memories and stories to tell. Apart from wearing a mask all the time, living and working in Japan especially during a pandemic must have been very stressful and challenging for you, but I am sure that your experiences will become invaluable and irreplaceable to not only yourselves but also to the community where you lived in Japan. I am also convinced that such experiences will become a cornerstone of the relationship between Japan and Australia.

Last month, Prime Minister Kishida Fumio met with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese for bilateral talks in Perth and both leaders signed a renewed Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation. Undoubtedly, these ministerial visits will strengthen the Japan-Australia relationship, but we must not forget that the strong Japan-Australia relationship is underpinned by grassroots-level connections shaped by individuals including the JET participants.

Tonight's guests, including members of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Melbourne, teachers from the Japanese School of Melbourne, university lecturers in

Japanese Studies, and of course the former JET participants, all have strong connections with Japan. As for myself and my wife Kaoru, we are originally from Osaka, which will be celebrating the 45th anniversary of its sister city relationship with Melbourne next year.

On the topic of Melbourne, the annual Japanese Film Festival is coming to the cinemas this month. This year's opening film is *Dreaming of the Meridian Arc*. It is a comedy drama film about making a TV series on Ino Tadataka, the first person to map Japan in 1821. Ino walked over 40,000 kilometers, which is even greater than the circumference of the Earth, to make the first surveyed map of Japan, which was extremely accurate. The Edo Shogunate carried out surveys to prepare for threats from Russia and other countries.

Although not to the same extent as Ino Tadataka, I hope that many of the JET returnees were able to visit various parts of Japan during the programme. It took Ino 17 years to finish surveying in Japan on foot. As Japan is now fully open again to the world, you might want to return to Japan to visit the places you missed and discover something new in Japan!

Tonight is an opportunity for the JET returnees to share their memories and experiences in Japan with us. I hope you will all enjoy tonight's gathering!

Thank you.