

Good evening,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to tonight's Emperor's Birthday Reception.

Despite the global challenges of the past few years, the Australia-Japan relationship remains stronger than ever. I am delighted to be part of its growth. It is thanks to everyone here that our two countries enjoy such a strong partnership across the areas of business, tourism, education, security, defence, science, energy, technology, culture, sport and diplomatic ties.

It has been my great pleasure to welcome to Japan recently the Governors of Victoria and South Australia; and the Premier of South Australia. The calibre of these official visits signifies the importance placed on the Japanese market by Victoria, South Australia, and Tasmania, for which I am immensely grateful. I hope for many more ministerial visits throughout the year.

Looking at visits in the other direction, I am pleased that Australia hosted some senior delegations from Japan in 2022. Last February, we welcomed Mr Yoshimasa Hayashi, Foreign Minister of Japan, to Melbourne for the Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting.

In October, Prime Minister Kishida visited Perth, where Australia and Japan renewed their Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation and signed a Critical Minerals Partnership. It was also during this visit that Australia agreed to work with Japan on a JAXA mission to one of Mars' moons. This partnership will see the MMX - Martian Moons eXploration, depart for the moon Phobos in 2024, collect samples, and land in Woomera in South Australia in 2029. You may remember Woomera as the same location where a capsule from the Hayabusa2 dropped in December 2020.

2023 promises to be equally exciting thanks to Australia's intention to host the Quad Prime Ministers' meeting. I am grateful to the representatives of the Quad nations here in Melbourne: the Consul-Generals of the United States and India, and DFAT, for their ongoing support in strengthening ties amongst the Quad at the state level.

I would like to particularly thank Andrew Cumpston for his contribution to the Consular Corps in Melbourne. It will be sad to see him go.

In October, 60th Annual Australia-Japan Joint Business Conference will be held in Melbourne - one of the largest events in our shared calendar. I would like to express my gratitude to Richard Andrews and his team, for their ongoing work in relation to these conferences.

I must also thank the fantastic Australia-Japan related organisations, trade commissioners, and all of our educational partners in the three states who work tirelessly on the relationship. Their commitment does not go unnoticed, and I am especially pleased to see the next generation of passionate individuals coming up through their organisations.

Almost half a century ago, we saw the first boom of the Australia-Japan relationship, when many sister-city relationships were established. I hope that we are entering a second wave as we are coming out of COVID, and there are many opportunities to be explored.

I am from Osaka. Melbourne and Osaka will celebrate their 45th sister-city anniversary this year. This is a wonderful milestone and I would like to thank everyone at the City of Melbourne for their efforts in sustaining the relationship on the Australian side. Also the Melbourne to Osaka yacht race promises to be one of the major events of 2025, with preparations underway by George Shaw and the Sandringham Yacht Club. In addition, Expo 2025 in Osaka, Kansai will provide many opportunities for Australia.

At the state level, I would like to congratulate the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Adelaide for the opening of their office last July.

In Tasmania-Japan relations, I am pleased to share that the Umitaka Maru ship, a training and research vessel of the Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology, docked in Hobart on the 7th February after being postponed due to the pandemic last year. It is my hope that Hobart will become a gateway to the South Pole for Japan in the future.

Tonight I hope you will try 'Hida-Gyu' beef from Gifu prepared by legendary chef Arakane-san. Please also sample the Japanese beer and sake on offer. There will also be tastings of a velvety cheesecake, which symbolises the Hokkaido snow, using milk from Hokkaido and cream cheese from Australia. What a wonderful collaboration! I hope you're inspired tonight to book a holiday to Japan. March or April is a lovely time to enjoy the cherry blossoms in Japan

Finally, I encourage you to look at the traditional and modern examples of Japanese culture we have on here display tonight including full sets of armour made in the 17th and 18th centuries and Hiramatsu Reiji's masterpiece inside our residence; as well as the latest Mirai 2, Outlander PHEV and even a hydrogen bus parked out the front!

I will wrap up my remarks here. Please enjoy yourselves and I hope for a moment that you will feel like you're visiting Japan this evening!

Thank you.

**Please note that some parts of the speech were omitted on the night.*