

Good morning.

It is my great pleasure to be here today for the launch of the “Australia-Japan Local Government Collaboration: Enriching Communities through International Engagement” report. Before I continue, I would like to congratulate all the research team members for their hard work and dedication put into this two-year long project. As the project was initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic, it must have faced many challenges, including lockdowns and travel restrictions. Despite these difficulties, you all have completed the report which will help us to better understand the Japan-Australia sister city relationship. お疲れ様でした。

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Australia-Japan Foundation of the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for sponsoring this project.

As the report notes, sister cities play an important role in strengthening and enriching local government and community relation between Japan and Australia. Each of these grassroots people-to-people links may be a small relationship, but the number of these links contribute significantly to the ties between cities and even between countries.

Through sister city exchanges, countless inter-city friendships have been forged. It gives me great joy every time I have the opportunity to attend sister city related events and celebrations in Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania - the three states under our Consulate’s jurisdiction - to witness how close these friendships are.

Today, I would like to briefly talk about the sister city relationships in each of these states.

Here in Victoria, there are 18 Japan-Australia sister cities, some of which are celebrating milestones this year. One of these is the Osaka-Melbourne relationship. Established in 1978, Osaka-Melbourne is one of the longest and most active Japan-Australia sister city relationships.

Over the past 45 years, Osaka and Melbourne have established numerous cooperative relationships, including official and community-level delegation visits, educational exchanges, innovation and business partnerships, and sporting events.

I hear that the new Mayor of Osaka will officially visit Melbourne in October this year. While I also heard that Lord Mayor Sally Capp also privately visited Japan a few months ago to visit her son who is currently studying at ICU in Tokyo! I was delighted to hear that the Lord Mayor and her family had stopped in Osaka, which is my hometown, and explore the city with their son as a guide and interpreter throughout their trip!

Among many educational exchanges, recent initiatives include the strategic partnership between the University of Melbourne and Osaka University. The two cities also continue to run the Melbourne-Osaka Sister City award at the annual Victoria Speech Contest, which will be held next weekend, providing opportunities for Japanese learners in Victoria to visit and experience Osaka. In collaboration with upcoming events, more than 100 yachts

participating in the Melbourne to Osaka yacht race organised by the Sandringham Yacht Club, are scheduled to leave Melbourne for Osaka in March 2025 to coincide with the opening of the Expo 2025 in Osaka, Kansai, in April 2025.

Now, moving onto South Australia.

Sister city relations in South Australia have also been very active this year. Over the past few months, there have been a number of exchanges and delegation visits between Japan and South Australia's sister cities. For instance, the City of Marion hosted the Mayor and delegation from its sister city Kokubunji, Tokyo for its 30th anniversary celebration in May. Next Tuesday, there will be an anniversary event for Bizen City, Okayama and Clare & Gilbert Valleys, where the Deputy Mayor of Bizen and Mayor of Clare will unveil a new friendship monument.

Himeji, Hyogo, famous for its majestic castle, has a sister city relationship with Adelaide, and the magnificent Adelaide Himeji Garden is one of Adelaide's most popular tourist attractions. The garden, which was opened in 1985 to commemorate the establishment of the sister city relationship, plays a significant role in promoting cultural exchange in the hope of maintaining a positive and long-lasting relationship between the two cities. Currently, the garden is maintained by the council's horticultural staff, who pass on the skills taught by the designer of the garden Mr KUMADA Yoshitaka, from generation to generation

Finally, Tasmania.

I would like to share with you a heartwarming episode from the Yaizu-Hobart relationship.

As mentioned in the report, this sister city relationship has always been active due to various activities and education exchanges between the two cities. The history of this close relationship dates back to the mid-1970, more than 40 years ago, when then Lord Mayor of Hobart, Alderman Doug Plaister, visited Yaizu, Shizuoka, to establish a sister city relationship. There he met Ms SEKIYAMA Fumiko, a modern dance teacher in Yaizu. As Fumiko-san participated in the exchange programs and frequently took her students to Hobart, the two grew closer and fell in love. Fumiko-san then married Mr Plaister and moved to Hobart in 1982. She later became a driving force behind the Yaizu-Hobart relationship, contributing significantly to student exchange programs for over 25 years. In 2016, she was awarded The Order of the Rising Sun Silver Rays by the then Emperor of Japan.

The number of Australian tourists to Japan has exceeded pre-pandemic levels and travelling to Japan has become a boom again. JNTO reported that the number of Australians visited Japan last month was 35,600 which was 2.1% more than in July 2019. The number of Japanese students coming to study at Australian universities has been increasing as well. This will be a new wave.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the Japan-Australia sister city relationships will be revitalised as suggested in the report. We look forward with great anticipation to new developments in the Japan-Australia friendship.

Before I wrap up, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have been involved and will continue to be involved in the Japan-Australia sister cities relationship, in particular the people of sister cities, volunteers, local governments, sister city related associations such as Sister Cities Australia (SCA), and CLAIR office in Sydney.

Once again, congratulations on the publication of the report and thank you for listening.

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