

Good morning.

It is my great pleasure to be here today for the Sister Cities Australia's 2023 National Conference. I would like to thank Sister Cities Australia (SCA) and Wyndham City for hosting this conference, which provides a wonderful opportunity for us to come together to exchange our insights and learn from each other.

As the theme of this year's conference suggests, I believe sister city relations play an important part in connecting the world. Sister cities act as bridges between cities around the world, creating opportunities for cultural and educational exchange, economic cooperation, and much more. And perhaps most importantly, they foster friendships across cultures and borders.

Australia currently has 109 sister cities with Japan. 19 of these cities are in Victoria. If another two states that I cover, SA and Tasmania, are included, the number rises to 32. Since arriving in Australia, I have had many opportunities to attend sister city related events and celebrations in these three states. It is always a pleasure to see how close these friendships are. Tomorrow, I will be attending a reception to mark the 35th anniversary of the sister city relationship between Anjo City in Aichi Prefecture and Hobsons Bay.

As you may know, Wyndham City has a sister city relationship with Chiryu in Aichi Prefecture in Japan. Established in 2000, the Chiryu-Wyndham sister city relationship has shared various people-to-people exchanges over the past 23 years, including delegation visits by local students and citizens.

These grassroots people-to-people links may seem small, but their number contributes significantly to the strong ties between Japan and Australia. Indeed, grassroots-level exchanges are the foundation of sister city relationships between Japan and Australia, enabling the two cities to maintain and develop positive relations with each other.

Now that international travel is becoming active again, we look forward to further exchanges between Chiryu and Wyndham City and hope that this wonderful friendship will continue.

Another sister city relationship in Victoria – the Osaka-Melbourne relationship should also be briefly mentioned. According to Japanese Studies professors Mouer, who have recently received his Imperial Decoration this September, and Tsutsumi, sister city relationships between Japan and Victoria can be classified into three types. Type A known as the 'Cultural Activity-Oriented type', is a

relationship that focuses on cultural activities such as exchange programs, with the aim of exploring and experiencing new cultures. Most of the Victorian sister cities fall into Type A. While Type B, known as 'Economic Activity-Oriented Type' focuses on economic ties, with some cities seeking business opportunities with Japan. Type C, on the other hand, focuses on both cultural and economic aspects. According to Mouer and Tsutsumi, Osaka-Melbourne relationship is the only Type C in Victoria.

Celebrating their 45th anniversary this year, the Osaka-Melbourne relationship is one of the longest and most active sister city relationships between Japan and Australia. For over 45 years, Osaka and Melbourne have established and maintained a cooperative relationship in a variety of areas, including official visits, community-level delegation visits, educational exchanges, innovation and business partnerships, and sporting events.

This year, Osaka and Melbourne have a number of commemorative events planned for their anniversary. In just a week's time, the new Mayor of Osaka will make his first official visit to Melbourne. The Melbourne Osaka Cup, organised by the Sandringham Yacht Club, is also something to look forward to. More than 100 yachts participating in the race will leave Melbourne for Osaka in March 2025 to coincide with the opening of the Expo 2025 in Osaka, Kansai, in April 2025. Mr George Shaw of the Sandringham Yacht Club will give his presentation on the Melbourne Osaka Cup later today!

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 delegation visits and anniversary events between sister cities of Japan and South Australia. For example, in May, the City of Marion invited a mayoral delegation from its sister city Kokubunji in Tokyo to celebrate the 30th anniversary of their sister city relationship. Meanwhile, in August, Deputy Mayor of Bizen City in Okayama and Mayor of Clare & Gilbert Valleys unveiled a new friendship monument called 'Friendship Bridge' to commemorate the 33rd anniversary of the two cities' sister city relationships. The monument is the second of its kind, following the '友情' (friendship) Torii gate, which now stands proudly in the Gleeson Wetlands.

As for Tasmania, I would like to conclude with a heartwarming episode from the Yaizu-Hobart relationship.

The history of this close-knit sister city ties dates back more than 40 years, to the mid-1970s, when the then Lord Mayor of Hobart, Alderman Doug Plaister, visited Yaizu in Shizuoka, to establish a sister city relationship. There he met Ms SEKIYAMA Fumiko, a modern dance teacher in Yaizu. As Fumiko-san took part in the exchange programs and frequently took her students to Hobart, the two grew closer and fell in love. Fumiko-san later married Mr Plaister and moved to Hobart in 1982. She then 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. It is truly a sister city relationship filled with love!

Once again, I would like to thank Sister Cities Australia (SCA) and all those who have been involved and will continue to be involved in this incredible network of sister cities. We will continue to nurture these bonds of friendship and strive to build a more interconnected and harmonious world for generations to come.

Thank you.