

Good evening everyone and welcome to tonight's farewell reception.

It is truly hard to believe that nearly four years have passed since we arrived. Although we had an unconventional start to our posting by arriving during lockdown, it was easy to settle in and make friends thanks to everyone's kindness.

During my tenure, my team and I have welcomed some high-level delegations to Melbourne, including Foreign Minister Hayashi for the Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting in February 2022, and just a few weeks ago, Foreign Minister Kamikawa and Defence Minister Kihara to Melbourne for 2+2 meetings. We also took part in the AJBCC Conference last October, where we welcomed over 600 delegates working in the Australia-Japan space. I am looking forward to attending this event in Aichi next month.

I am pleased that a number of people who have received Japanese decorations and commendations are here tonight. It has been a great pleasure of mine to bestow these awards on such deserving recipients and I ask for your continued support in the relationship going forward.

As you all know, our consulate has responsibility for South Australia and Tasmania as well as Victoria. Over the course of my tenure, I have made over 50 interstate visits to these other states and I have been delighted to see growth in so many of their industries that have ties to Japan.

Despite there being many changes in governments, premiers, and ministers across all three states, we have seen progress in trade, tourism, energy, space, and education to name a few, and strong overall support for the Japan relationship no matter which party is in power. I would like to extend my thanks to all departmental staff and overseas trade commissioners working hard to support their ministers and the relationship with Japan on a daily basis.

We have many Japanese company representatives here tonight as well. I want to thank the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry for your continued support since my arrival. You are all doing wonderful work for your individual organisations and work very well together. I was thrilled to see the opening of a JCCI office in Adelaide in 2022. This network is continuing to grow, with more and more companies seeking to call Adelaide home.

Hydrogen is one of the areas we have seen a big leap forward in recently. I'm sure nearly everyone here has heard me talk about my love for Japan's Hydrogen Fuel-Cell vehicle, the Mirai II. When I arrived in Melbourne this car was not operating in Victoria, and now we have 24 vehicles across the state. Thank you to Kanno-san for always accepting my requests to bring new people to test-drive these vehicles! He has never said no!

I am grateful to have seen so much progress in the HESC project. It was a very memorable day when I went to the Port of Hastings for the arrival of the Suiso Frontier in 2022. I hope for this project's continued success and a further scaling up of the hydrogen industry.

My only regret during my time here is that we were not able to make an official sumo tournament happen. I will keep advocating for this and I hope that someday we will see them here. If that happens, I will have to come back!

On the Australian side, I want to give my thanks to the Australia-Japan Business Council of Victoria. You have a fantastic network here and it has been my pleasure to work with you all. The Gala Dinner was a highlight for Kaoru and I every year and I'm glad we were able to attend last week's event before our departure. This Gala really encapsulates the spirit of the Victoria-Japan relationship.

As Consul-General, it is delightful to see so much support for Japan amongst the younger generation. I have met so many participants of the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme, both before they went and on their return. I hope for the continued success of JET and for it to lead to wonderful career opportunities for the next generation.

To our Consular Corps colleagues who have become dear friends. We will miss you so much but we know that we have made life-long friends amongst you all. There is a wonderful harmony between career and honorary consuls here in Melbourne. While the career consuls come and go, with new faces every few years, the network of honorary consuls ensure stability and continuity for our international partnerships.

This is a wonderful balance and there is no doubt that Melbourne has the best Consular Corps in Australia. Thank you to our Dean, Joseph, from Croatia, our Deputy Dean, Maria, from the Philippines, our Secretary, Andrew, from Guatemala as well as the rest of the Corps committee for your tireless work in keeping us connected through such fun events.

Kaoru and I will return to Japan in October and wait for information on our next posting. We have enjoyed hosting so many of you for lunches, dinners and receptions at our residence to learn about the work that you do.

We have a lot to look forward to in our hometown next year, specifically the Melbourne to Osaka yacht race and then the World Expo. I hope many of you will have a chance to go to Osaka during the six months of Expo to support the work of the Australian pavilion.

I also hope you will show my successor the same support and friendship you've all shown Kaoru and I. My successor will arrive in November and I know he is very much looking forward to meeting you all.

We will miss Melbourne, the city, the people, the food and the football. My sincere thanks to everyone here tonight for making our posting such a memorable experience. Before I wrap up, I have a quick story. The other day I was walking around the city and an Aussie couple from WA asked me the way to Swanston Street. It truly made me feel like a local when I was able to help them!

We will never forget you. We don't want to say 'goodbye' but simply 'see you soon' somewhere in the world. In fact, I will see some of you in Aichi in October for JABCC.

Thank you.