

**Address by Mr. TANAKA Kazunari**  
**Consul-General of Japan in Brisbane**  
**at the Emperor's Birthday Reception**  
**on Friday 21 February 2020**  
**at the Official Residence of the Consul-General**

Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to thank you very much for attending this reception to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty, the Emperor of Japan.

Before I begin, I would just like to touch upon the horrific bushfires which have ravaged a country over the past several months. It has been very heartbreaking to see the damage they have caused, to peoples' homes, properties, and of course their ordinary daily life and to Australia's precious fauna and flora. I express my sincere condolences to those who have lost loved ones, and I hope that communities are able to rebuild and recover from such tragedy with nation- and world-wide compassion.

Last month in response to this disaster we dispatched Japan Disaster Relief Self-Defense Force Units with two cargo planes and provided N95 masks to assist Australia's efforts. I would also like to mention the Japanese business and community groups here in Australia who have been involved in raising funds and various support activities. It is very much humbling and most inspiring.

The catalyst for modern-day active volunteering in Japan was the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995 when city of Kobe, sister city of Brisbane was devastated, and has since spread on a grand scale, particularly among young generations and especially since the 3.11 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, which marks its nine year anniversary next month.

If I may, I would like to ask you to join me to propose a vote of thanks to emergency, fire, medical, police and military services personnel and volunteers, some of whose top officers are represented tonight, for their courageous efforts.

Tonight's reception marks the first for His Majesty Emperor Naruhito since his accession to the throne and start of the new Japanese Era of Reiwa, beautiful harmony, in May last year. Generations of the nation's development through its rich history were exemplified in solemn pomp – in part-traditional and part modern-style – and circumstances of the accession. This new beginning, I believe, is a catalyst to further strengthen Japan from both the domestic and international engagement perspectives.

Over my near 40-year association with Australia, I have noticed the country go through great and successful societal transformation. It has truly become a multi-cultural and -ethnic society, including first nations, and a genuine Asia-Pacific nation.

The Japan-Australia relationship strongly fits within this context, with our traditional economic complementary ties expanding to cooperation, exchange and mutual understanding in the fields of culture, education and research, politics, and defence. It is a developed, multi-levelled relationship centred on shared principles and values among us.

The Year 2019 has been a busy one for Japan and indeed the Japan-Queensland relationship. Japan hosted both the G20 Summit in Osaka and the Rugby Union World Cup around the nation. These events provided a perfect opportunity for visitors from around the world to see and experience a revitalising and transforming Japan, and for Japanese people to realize the importance of diversity in their society. I am happy to tell you that many Australians took their weeks-long holidays in Japan, not only enjoying games and the beauty of Japan but also contributing a record sales of beers in pubs and sport clubs around the stadiums!

On the local front, the Japan-Queensland relationship marked a significant milestone last year, celebrating 35 years of sister-state relationship between Saitama Prefecture and Queensland.

Collaboration and cooperation is on the increase, from institutional research in robotics and renewable energy, educational and sports exchanges, to industry-specific training programmes. We are very proud of this progress, and it is very pleasing to see so much activity, especially on the back of formalised agreements and structure, which was renewed last year.

Looking forward, there is a lot of activity going on in the Year 2020. As host of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, Japan will be the centre of world-wide attention, probably much more than with the Rugby World Cup and we are thrilled to welcome thousands of athletes and spectators from around the globe.

With the Olympic torch relay to begin in Fukushima, the Games will also shine a light on Japan's recovery efforts from 3.11, and also provide Japan with a platform to show our appreciation for all the support we have received from around the world, including from many Queenslanders and Australians, over the past nine years.

Sport has the ability to transcend boundaries among cultures, peoples and philosophies, and I am very excited to see not only the Games themselves, but also so-called Olympic legacies which will be brought in with the Games. After Melbourne and Sydney hosted one each, and Brisbane hosted the Expo and the G20 on record, it is time for this beautiful city and surrounding southeast Queensland to host and I look forward to Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2032.

Next month also sees the inaugural Virgin Australia's direct flight between Brisbane and Haneda. In addition to the current Brisbane-Narita service by Qantas, it will open up another door and new opportunities. I have no doubt it will be a game-changer in strengthening and expanding across all levels of the Japan-Queensland relationship including business, trade, agriculture, tourism, and education and research.

Further, the year 2020 also marks the 35th anniversary of the Brisbane-Kobe sister-city relationship. This is Brisbane's first such relationship to be formalised, and since its inception, both cities have worked to strengthen the relationship to reach mutually-beneficial outcomes with reciprocal visits with emphasis on business, education and sporting exchanges, and assistance from both sides in times of need such as the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake and the 2011 Brisbane floods. I look forward various activities in both ends and will be more than happy to be involved with and to assist them to celebrate this significant milestone.

I have to touch upon the Novel Coronavirus, particularly as the world watching the ordeal of crews and passengers on board the Diamond Princess off the port of Yokohama and the Olympic and Paralympic Games approaching.

The Government of Japan is making utmost efforts to prevent virus from entering Japan, to prevent virus and infection to spread within Japan, to provide necessary quarantine and medical treatment for anybody affected regardless of his/her nationality, and to cooperate with the international community including WHO in sharing information and medical expertise and in striving for containing the infection and producing vaccination.

I believe in science and international cooperation, and sincerely hope that we will overcome this international epidemic situation as soon as possible.

Tonight we have brought Japanese flavour, technology and hospitality here, which were made only possible with many local sponsors' generous support and their presence. I thank you very much. Further details will be introduced by the M.C. later.

In closing, I wish to thank everyone here this evening for playing an active role in the Japan-Queensland relationship. Your dedication and efforts are vital in keeping our ties moving forward as our relationship expands and diversifies in the new era of Reiwa.

I hope you will enjoy this reception and I wish you well all!

Thank you.