

## **AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL EXCHANGE COUNCIL**

### **28<sup>th</sup> AUSTRALIAN DELEGATION TO JAPAN**

**28 October to 3 November 2023**

#### **DELEGATION**

**Senator Catryna Bilyk** (Australian Labor Party) **Delegation Leader**  
Senator for Tasmania

**Hon David Littleproud MP** (Leader of the National Party)

**Ms Kate Thwaites MP** (Member for Jagajaga)

**Ms Gabrielle Cataldo** (Australian Political Exchange Council)

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## Executive Summary

In the current changing and challenging geo-political climate, Japan and Australia enjoy a close and mature relationship which is fundamental to both countries strategic and economic interests. The relationship is underpinned by a shared commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, as well as common approaches to international security. Both countries share a commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific that is resilient and inclusive.

Japan is Australia's second largest source of foreign investment and one of our largest trading partners. We share significant trade, investment, defence and security ties as well as a deep affinity between our people. We recognise that our partnership must continue to evolve to meet the growing risks to our mutual strategic interests and our shared values.

The delegation had opportunity for discussion with several government ministries, including Economics, Trade and Industry; Foreign Affairs; and Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. On each occasion we were able to deepen our understanding of our mutual interests. Together we will maintain an open, free, safe and secure technological environment and together improve our shared awareness of cyber threats and law enforcement and border security to combat transnational and serious organised crime – including risks to critical supply chain.

From a cultural perspective the visit was invaluable. Our time in Hiroshima was deeply moving, with a talk by a survivor of the atomic bomb and the opportunity to lay a wreath in memory. Our immersion in Kyoto culture was memorable in a different way. We visited temples and gained an appreciation of Japan's respect for tradition at a tea ceremony and an arts performance. More contemporary insights were offered by a visit to the Diet and TeamLab in Tokyo, where we absorbed the distinctive vibrancy of life in contemporary Japan.

The delegation came away from this visit with a deepened understanding of the close ties between Australia and Japan, and the realisation that we share not just a friendship, but a common purpose.

## Report

### Official meetings

#### Ministry for Economy, Trade and Industry



#### **Meeting with the Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Economy, Trade and Industry, Mr Ishii Taku,**

In this productive meeting we discussed the significant economic and trade ties between Australia and Japan. Some of the key themes that emerged during meetings held included existing trade links between Japan and Australia, particularly in Australia's significant role in helping Japan meet its current and future energy needs. Japan views Australia as critical to its transition to a clean energy future and there was interest in Australia's plans for transition.

## Ministry for Foreign Affairs



### **Meeting with the Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr Komura Masahiro**

During this meeting Vice Minister Komura re-affirmed the close links between Australia and Japan. We discussed the important role both countries play as democracies in promoting the rules based international order in the Indo-Pacific region., and the potential for Japan and Australia to work more closely in the Pacific. We again visited the theme of energy security and the potential for Japan to drive innovation in research in new clean energy technologies, and the importance of Australia to Japan's clean energy transition.

### **Lunch meeting with Mr Iwamoto Keiichi – Deputy Director-General, Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

This lunch provided an opportunity to revisit many of the themes of the visit in a more informal setting. It also included discussion of the strong people-to-people connections between Australia and Japan, including those created by the long-standing Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program. Under this program, many Australians, particularly young Australians, have spent time living and working in Japan teaching English.

## Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery



### **Meeting with Vice-Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery, Mr Takahashi Mitsuo**

Various critical topics were addressed during the meeting with the Vice-Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery. Notably, food security emerged as a significant concern for the Japanese government, promoting detailed discussions on how Australia could play a pivotal role in ensuring this. Discussions centred around enhancing trade and expediting bio-sanitary approvals between Japan and Australia.

A focus point of the discussion was the export of Australian avocados to Japan. Australian east coast avocado producers are seeking the same bio-sanitary standards as Western Australian exporters. Beyond avocados, there was a broader discussion about prioritisation of approvals of bio-sanitary standards on a number of commodities that would accelerate and increase agricultural trade.

Senator Bilyk assured that the issues raised regarding bio-sanitary measures would be relayed to Minister Watt for further consideration and action.

### **Dinner hosted by the Japan-Australia Parliamentary Friendship Association (JAPFA) Affairs**

The delegation held a very collegiate discussion with members of the Japan-Australia Parliamentary Friendship Association. Discussion ranged from the similarities and differences between our two systems of democratic elections and Parliaments, the recent rugby world cup and the Australian's attempt to explain why our rugby campaign had gone so badly, to Japan's declining population base and recent policy initiatives to support women to have more children.

Again, we discussed the strong people to people links Australia and Japan have, the high number of Australian's currently visiting Japan, and the desire on both sides for those links to remain strong.



## Kawasaki Heavy Industries



***Meeting with Chairman of the Board, Mr Yoshinori Kanehana and Non Executive Director Ms Melanie Brock.***

Kawasaki Heavy Industries built the Suiso Frontier, the world's first liquid hydrogen carrier which was commissioned to transport liquefied hydrogen from Port Hastings in Victoria, Australia to Kobe, Japan.

The groundbreaking venture marked the first-ever large-scale shipment of hydrogen in liquid form. The Suiso Frontier made its historic arrival into Australia in January 2022, catalysing significant strides in the energy export industry between the two nations.

Operated by a dedicated crew of 25, the voyage from Victoria to Japan spans two weeks, emphasizing the scale and complexity of this revolutionary transportation endeavour.

Looking ahead, Kawasaki Heavy Industries aims to augment this capability, expanding the capacity for liquid hydrogen transportation by sea. This initiative not only enhances the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain, but also fosters a strategic partnership between Australia and Japan, facilitating the provision of clean energy and bolstering economic gains for Australia.

## J-POWER

### **Meeting with CEO Mr Kanno and Executive Vice President, Mr Sasatsu**

J-POWER stands as a prominent force in the Japanese energy landscape, harnessing diverse sources of power to the nation, including large-scale solar power plants, wind, geothermal, biomass, hydroelectric and nuclear sources.

As part of its strategic vision, J-POWER is exploring the possibility of reactivating nuclear power plants in Japan. Nuclear energy has the capacity to generate 21 % of the Japanese energy grid. Recognising the imperative of achieving the government's commitment to carbon neutrality by 2050, the resurgence of nuclear power in Japan is being actively considered a viable and sustainable option.

In line with this commitment, J-POWER is planning to construct a 1200MW power plant, the Ohma Nuclear Power Plant. This facility aims to significantly enhance J-POWER's nuclear capacity, providing a substantial source of CO<sub>2</sub>-free energy and ensuring a consistent and stable power supply for Japan. Notably, the plant will operate using recycled spent fuel, aligning with environmental sustainability goals.

With a paramount focus on safety, J-POWER is prioritising stringent safety measures as it expands its nuclear capacity. This commitment underscores the company's dedication to meeting the highest standards while contributing to Japan's energy needs in a sustainable manner.



## Culture and History

### Hiroshima



**Peace Memorial Park**

Our visit to the city of Hiroshima left a lasting impression on us all. On 6 August 1945, a single atomic bomb indiscriminately killed thousands of people, profoundly disrupting and altering the lives of the survivors. We visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, the only structure left standing in the area where the atomic bomb exploded. Through the efforts of many people, including those of the city of Hiroshima, it has been preserved in the same state as immediately after the bombing. Through belongings left by the victims, bombed artifacts, testimonies of bomb survivors and related materials, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum conveys to the world the horrors and the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons and spreads the message of “No More Hiroshimas.”

We were honoured to meet one of those survivors, Ms Yahata, who spoke to us about her personal experience as an eight-year-old child. She learned English in her eighties so that she could tell her story to people from around the world. There are very few living survivors, and it was a privilege to hear the poignant perspective of an innocent child. She is powerful advocate for a peaceful world where this can never happen again.

Despite the grim living conditions in Hiroshima after the atomic bombing, residents rose from the ashes to rebuild their lives and bring their city back. Help came as well from elsewhere in Japan and from overseas. Today, Hiroshima’s population has grown to more than one million.

In 1954 a Japanese fishing boat was contaminated by radioactive fallout from an U.S. hydrogen bomb test on the Bikini Atoll, which sparked a surge in interest in abolishing nuclear weapons. The Peace Memorial Museum opened in August 1955. While it is a stark reminder and a powerful symbol of the destructive force of the atomic bomb, it also expresses hope for world peace and the ultimate elimination of all nuclear weapons. Guided by Mr Mametani, the

Deputy Director of the Museum, the delegation placed a wreath at the Memorial Cenotaph for Atomic Bomb Victims, a tribute to those who suffered from the harrowing experience and its aftermath.

### **Children's Peace Memorial**

Erected in 1958 the Hiroshima Children's Peace Monument is a 9 metres high, oblong-shaped structure, on which are engraved the words: "This is our cry, this is our prayer, to build a world of peace." Inside is a bell and origami in the shape of cranes, symbols of peace wind. The monument is dominated by a bronze statue of Sadako Sasaki, a young girl who was 2 years old when the atomic bomb exploded above Hiroshima. She was two kilometres away and escaped any harm. Although she grew up in good health, and was sporty and well known, ten years after the bombing she suddenly contracted leukemia which was linked to the radiation from the bomb.

Many Japanese believe anyone who folds a thousand paper cranes will have their wish granted. Sadako Sasaki began to make origami in the shape of a crane, wishing to return to full health and her schooling. She exceeded the number of one thousand needed, but unfortunately died at the age of twelve years.

With the help of many, including local school principals, it was agreed to build a monument which pays homage, not only to Sadako but to all the child victims of the bomb. Paper cranes have since become a symbol of peace worldwide.

### **Miyajima**



Boarding a ferry in Hiroshima Bay, we travelled to Itsukushima to visit Miyajima (Shrine Island). Viewing the Shinto Great Torii Gate which is partially submerged at high tide and is listed as a UNESCO world Heritage was a highlight for us.

Itsukushima is a mountainous and sparsely settled rural area approximately 30 square kilometres in size. A population of approximately 2000 people live in small towns with simple houses and privately owned shops. The islanders work hard to preserve the forests and respect the natural beauty of the island. The island is seen as sacred, so trees may not be cut for lumber. The tame Sika deer are sacred in the native Shinto area as they are seen as godly messengers and so roam freely around the island.

## Kyoto

### Traditional tea ceremony



Our group was able to actively participate in the rich cultural heritage of Japanese tea making, through a less formal process -- taking one hour instead of the average four hours. A significant role in the Japanese tea ceremony is simplicity, elegance, and a deep appreciation of beauty. Natural materials are used in the rooms, linking to the natural environment. Seasonal elements are thoughtfully chosen and placed.

This serene ritual is an integral part of Japanese tradition. We were shown how very step, and every moment, is precisely defined with the ceremony being marked by the basic principles of Harmony, Respect, Purity and Tranquillity - which also serve as a guide to living a fulfilling life which we should all strive for.

### Gion Corner Arts Performance

Performing arts are important in all the different medium: they help share unique cultural stories and history which reflect on and uphold the ideas and customs which the society values. Performing arts also assist the viewers from other cultures to better understand Japanese culture. Our group was able to view seven of Kyoto's traditional performing arts, presented in an hour-long show on one stage. This is a unique way to highlight the many traditional Japanese performing arts. We were entertained by Koto

music, ikebana flower arrangement, a tea ceremony, puppet theatre, kyogen comedy and kyomai dance, providing us with an excellent overview and experience.

## **Temples**

Kyoto is a city with over 1600 temples, and we were fortunate to visit some of the most impressive and memorable ones. Kinkakuji, meaning Golden Pavilion, is a Zen temple whose top two floors are completely covered in gold leaf. Formally known as Rokuonji, the temple was the retirement villa of a shogun but became a Zen temple after his death in 1408. An impressive structure built overlooking a large pond, it has burned down numerous times throughout its history, most recently in 1950 when it was set on fire by a fanatic monk. The present structure was rebuilt in 1955.

We also visited Kiyomizudera (literally "Pure Water Temple"), one of the most celebrated temples in Japan. It was founded in 780 and in 1994 was added to the list of UNESCO world heritage sites. Kiyomizudera is best known for its wooden stage that juts out from the main hall, 13 metres above the hillside. Built without the use of nails, the stage is an excellent place from which to view the many cherry and maple trees below, as well as of the city of Kyoto in the distance.

From this historical, cultural immersion we stepped straight into the twenty first century, to enjoy the luxury of the Shinkansen to Tokyo.



## Tokyo

### National Diet



We were interested to learn about the Japanese national Diet and how closely it resembles our own democratic government structure. The Emperor has long represented the Japanese state, but since 1947 the Emperor can only act politically as directed by Japan's democratically elected government.

The Diet has the sole ability to make laws in Japan. Like our Australian parliament, the Diet is bicameral, with a House of Councillors (upper house) and a (lower) House of Representatives (lower house). There are 248 seats in the House of Councillors and 465 seats in the House of Representatives. Electoral terms are four years for the lower house and six years for the upper house; elections for the latter are held every three years, with half the seats at stake.

We were curious about the name Japan's government was inspired by that of Germany. In English, the German legislature is usually called the Diet (or some variation of that word), hence the name. The Japanese Constitution describes the Diet as the "highest organ of state power," and the National Diet building is appropriately grand. No expense was spared in its design and décor. Completed in 1936 after 17 years of construction, some of its most impressive features are the murals in the Central Hall which depict the four seasons, and its elegant stained-glass windows.

## **Imperial Palace**

We enjoyed a walk around the beautiful east gardens in the grounds of the Imperial Palace. This has served as the residential place of the successive Emperors since 1868 and is where the Emperor undertakes official duties. Various ceremonies and public activities are held there too. We saw the Palace Sericulture Centre, and learned that successive Empresses have raised silkworms there since 1871.

## **Ginza**

The Ginza is the most famous one square meter of land in Tokyo. Known for its shopping, dining and entertainment, the district's centre is worth over ten million yen, making the most expensive real estate in Japan. Ginza means "silver mint" in Japanese. Today's Ginza district was the site of a silver coin mint in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. It evolved as an upmarket shopping district following the 1923 Great Kanto earthquake and today features numerous department stores, restaurants, boutiques, art galleries and night clubs.

The most identifiable landmark in Tokyo, the Shibuya crossing is a sprawling intersection just outside Shibuya Station. It is an appropriate metaphor for the city itself, with activity in every direction, busy buildings, and lots of advertisements and flashing lights.

## **TeamLab**

Visiting TeamLab Planets in Tokyo was a lovely way to end our visit to Japan – a mixture of virtual reality, art museum and theme-park. The interactive modern digital art displays were unique. Four exhibition spaces are highly tactile and host different large-scale artworks which explore the relationship between natural and artificial creations, immersing the visitor's body in an interactive world. Thanks to the brilliant collaboration between artists, programmers, engineers, CG animators, mathematicians and architects, we experienced contemporary art at its cutting edge.

We began walking up a slight incline with water running at our feet, leading to a waterfall, then continued through changing hues of hanging, mirrored lights, to a pond where digitalised light fish "swam" amongst the legs of the many guests. We then moved on to a dome of moving digital flowers and then mirrored walls of live hanging orchids to walk or sit amongst. It is hard to describe the sensation when the normal boundaries between the self and an artwork are blurred. Even more than that-- our perception was also shaped by the many other people wandering freely among the exhibitions, who also helped create difference. This display is very well designed and co-ordinated, with many patrons -- almost one in ten visitors to Japan visit the exhibition -- flowing seamlessly. The feeling of continuity between the individual, the art and the people mixed reality and fantasy together in a memorable way.

## Conclusion

This exchange was a unique opportunity to experience Japanese culture and learn more about their history, their political structure, and their current agenda. Japan is Australia's closest partner in Asia. By immersing ourselves in a range of activities, the members of the delegation found a greater appreciation of depth of this partnership. Besides sharing fundamental values and strategic interests, both our countries are concerned with strengthening security partnership, the rule of law, freedom of navigation and working together in the future.

The delegation is deeply indebted to Ms Kanako Shiga from the International Hospitality and Conference Service Association Japan, who travelled with us and ensured that everything ran smoothly. We thank the Australian Political Exchange Program for their work in organising this visit, and we particularly appreciate the contribution of Gabrielle Cataldo, who was such a helpful, obliging and convivial companion. We are also grateful to the Japanese Ministers who made themselves available to us and to the staff and translators who enabled us to make the most of the discussions we had. We also thank the members of the JAPFA and everyone who made us welcome in Japan.

### **Senator Catryna Bilyk**

Senator for Tasmania

Chair of the Australia Japan Friendship Group

**Delegation Leader**