

Seventh Australia-Japan Conference: Co-chairs' Statement

The Seventh Australia-Japan Conference was held in Brisbane on 4 November 2011. The Conference was co-chaired by Sir Rod Eddington, Chairman of the Australia-Japan Business Cooperation Committee, and Mr Akio Mimura, Chairman of the Japan-Australia Business Cooperation Committee.

Participants included eminent representatives from politics, business, academia, think-tanks and media in both countries. Australia's Foreign Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, addressed conference participants. Mr Joe Nakano (Japan's Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs), Ms Julie Bishop (Deputy Leader of the Federal Opposition and Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade) and Senator Mark Furner (Member of the Australia-Japan Parliamentary Friendship Group and of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade) participated in the conference.

Conference discussions focussed on opportunities to advance the Australia-Japan relationship after the tragic earthquake and tsunami of 11 March 2011, including in the fields of political, strategic and defence cooperation, trade and economic cooperation with a particular focus on reform, and people-to-people links.

Japanese participants expressed heartfelt appreciation for the assistance provided by Australian governments, businesses and individuals in the aftermath of the March disasters. They acknowledged the significance of Prime Minister Gillard's visit to Japan in April 2011 as the first foreign leader to visit the disaster-affected areas. Participants agreed that the nature and scale of Australia's assistance highlighted and reinforced the strength of the friendship between Australia and Japan.

The main outcomes of the Conference discussions are outlined below.

Political, strategic and defence cooperation

Participants :

- welcomed the continued strengthening of the comprehensive strategic, security and economic partnership between Australia and Japan in recent years, noting that this partnership, together with both countries' alliances with the United States, represented an increasingly important pillar of regional security and prosperity in the context of the shift of economic and strategic weight to the Asia-Pacific region;
- noted that Japan's security relationship with Australia was second only to its alliance with the United States, as evidenced by the deployment only by Australia and the United States of military assets to contribute to relief activities in Japan following the March 2011 disasters;
- noted that the strong record of cooperation between Australia and Japan in the fields of peacekeeping and disaster relief served as a foundation for wider security cooperation, and in this regard welcomed the signature of an Acquisition and Cross-Serving Agreement and

the frequent joint military exercises involving Australia and Japan, and called on the two governments to consider developing arrangements to regularise the defence relationship;

- urged the two governments, as well as academia and the media in the two countries, to take steps to enhance public understanding of strategic dialogue and security cooperation as significant and growing facets of the bilateral relationship;
- recognised the potential for exchanges in the field of defence-related technology and materiel to contribute to deeper security cooperation between Australia and Japan;
- recognised the importance of cooperation on cyber-security, working in partnership with the broader community;
- underlined the significance of regular “2+2” meetings between foreign and defence ministers and of the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue, and looked forward to the next meetings of these dialogues being convened at an early date;
- urged the two governments to continue collaborating to improve regional and global architecture, notably through the G20, APEC and the East Asia Summit, and to maintain momentum in their cooperation in addressing global challenges such as nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament;
- called on the two governments to make efforts to reinvigorate the Young Political Leaders Exchange to foster mutual understanding and ongoing linkages between future generations of political leaders.

Trade and economic cooperation

Participants:

- noted that the economic relationship between Australia and Japan continued to make a fundamental contribution to the prosperity of both countries, with rapid growth in two-way trade and investment in recent years;
- urged the two governments to conclude negotiations on a comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement / Free Trade Agreement (EPA/FTA) in order to unlock the full potential of the bilateral economic partnership;
- underlined the past and future benefits for both countries of economic reform to open markets and improve productivity, and noted that ambitious structural and trade reform in Japan, including in the agricultural sector, would contribute to a comprehensive Australia-Japan EPA/FTA and to Japan’s involvement in regional economic integration;
- called for two-way visits and exchanges between Australian and Japanese farmers, including women and youth, to promote mutual understanding of the respective agricultural sectors of Australia and Japan and of successful approaches to agricultural modernisation and reform;
- welcomed Australia’s contribution to Japan’s energy security through a stable and reliable supply of energy resources, including rapid growth in the supply of Liquefied Natural Gas supported by major Japanese investment in Australia’s LNG sector;
- welcomed the expansion of cooperation by Australian and Japanese businesses beyond bilateral partnerships, by combining their respective strengths and shared values to work together in third countries in the rapidly growing Asia-Pacific region, including in the field of infrastructure.

People-to-people links

Participants:

- agreed that strong people-to-people ties represented a vital foundation for the security and economic partnership between Australia and Japan;
- expressed concern at the declining numbers of Australians studying Asian languages, including Japanese, and of young Australian scholars pursuing specialist studies in Japanese economics, politics and culture, and called on the two governments and the private sector to increase incentives and provide funding and demonstrated career pathways for Japan specialists;
- recalled the recommendations of the Joint Australia-Japan Working Group for the Promotion of Japanese Language Education and People-to-People Exchange endorsed by participants at the sixth Australia-Japan Conference, including the suggestion of national Australia-Japan Focus Reference Group, and noted that the Australian Government was assessing the feasibility of a “reverse JET” program as recommended by the Joint Working Group;
- welcomed ongoing Japanese efforts to enhance visiting programs for business people, university students and high-school students under the JENESYS program sponsored by the Japanese Government;