

(as delivered)

**Consul-General Sobashima's Speech at the
Emperor's Birthday Function, 2011**

**The Honourable Louise Asher, Deputy Leader of the Liberal
Party, and Minister for Innovation, Services and Small
Business, as well as for Tourism and Major Events
representing the Premier of Victoria,**

**The Honourable Tim Holding, Shadow Treasurer and Shadow
Minister for Industry,**

**Mr Brad Battin, Co-Chair of Parliamentary Friends of Japan
in Victoria,**

**Other Dignitaries whom I have failed to recognize, my
apologies,**

Mayors and City Councillors,

My Colleagues in the Consular Corps,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour and pleasure to welcome you all here tonight to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan.

Thank Heavens for the good weather today!

At the outset, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Federal and State Governments and the people of Australia including the Japanese residents, and indeed the many Governments and peoples of the international community for their sympathy and support extended to Japan after the March 11th Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

On the 23rd of this month, His Majesty the Emperor will be 78 years old.

Following the March 11th earthquake, Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress visited the stricken areas to extend heartfelt sympathy to the affected people and encourage them.

Their Majesties, in 1973 then Crown-Prince and Princess, visited Melbourne and other cities in Australia.

The Crown-Prince Naruhito and other members of the Japanese Imperial Family also visited Melbourne and Australia, which, I believe, has underpinned the strong bonds of friendship between Japan and Australia.

The Governments of Japan and Australia, for their part, have agreed to develop a strategic partnership between the two countries, based on shared common values such as freedom, democracy, and respect for human rights, and covering all areas of security, economy, culture and people-to-people exchanges.

When the Great East Japan Earthquake hit, the Australian Government promptly dispatched a search and rescue team and military aircraft to Japan.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard was the first head of foreign government to visit the affected area, Minami-sanriku-cho.

Here in Victoria, both Houses of Parliament passed unanimous motions of condolence and decided to donate to the recovery.

A condolence book was opened at the Melbourne Town Hall.

We received many messages of sympathy and various support from the Government, many municipalities and various organisations.

Indeed, many citizens offered aid and assistance.

For all of these, I would like to extend my gratitude once again.

Thank you very much.

Last month the Japanese Diet passed laws providing for financial arrangements for the reconstruction of the affected areas.

Japan will surely recover and repay everyone's kindness by contributing strongly to the international community again.

Today we have sake from Miyagi Prefecture, one of the most severely hit prefectures.

Please try it, as well as the Japanese beer which has been made available in recent years by the courtesy of Japanese brewers.

With respect to the economic relationship between our two countries, Japan had been Australia's largest bilateral trading partner until 2008, and still is a major trading partner.

Australia's largest trade surplus comes from Japan.

For Japan, Australia is the largest source of energy resources.

Japanese investment is quite active in Australia and Victoria in particular, as the Japanese companies whose representatives are present here tonight, work diligently with their Australian partners.

Last month Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda of Japan decided to enter into consultations towards participating in the negotiations of a Trans Pacific Partnership, TPP, with the countries concerned.

Also our two Governments have decided to resume negotiations of an EPA/FTA from this month.

Thus we expect even further development of our economic ties.

The number of Australia's sister-city and sister-state arrangements with Japan is the largest, having more than 100 relationships.

Victoria contributes 19 of these.

Japanese language is widely taught in Australia, particularly in Victoria and Queensland.

I am pleased to note that Japanese is the most studied foreign language in Australia.

After my arrival in Melbourne two months ago, I received delegations from the Japanese National Diet and Aichi Prefecture, as well as the Grand Master of the Urasenke way of tea.

We successfully concluded the 15th Japanese Film Festival in Melbourne yesterday.

While young Japanese teachers of Japanese are allocated to various schools in Victoria, my Consulate is now selecting Australian teachers of English to visit Japan under the so-called JET programme.

These are just a few examples of various exchanges taking place between Japan and Victoria.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For those who already read my greeting uploaded on our Consulate's website, allow me a repetition.

I am happy to be able to work in Melbourne, "The World's Most Liveable City."

In my role as Consul-General of Japan and with the cooperation of my colleagues present here, I hope I will be able to contribute to this liveability and share this enjoyment with you.

In doing so, I'm sure we will be able to further consolidate and develop the already vibrant relationship between Australia and Japan.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you once again for joining us tonight in the celebration of His Majesty the Emperor's birthday.

Now, I would like to request you to charge your glasses, so that I may propose a toast.

Wishing all of you present here continued good health and success, I would like to propose a toast to the Queen and the people of Australia.

“To the Queen and people of Australia!”