

Australian Political Exchange Council

29th Delegation to Japan

19 to 24 October 2024

Delegation Report

The Australian Political Exchange Council's (the Council) 29th Delegation to Japan took place from 19 to 24 October 2024. The delegation comprised Senator Slade Brockman, Senator for Western Australia; Mr. Dylan Wight MP, Member for Tarneit in the Victorian Parliament; Mr. Martin Cameron MP, Member for Morwell in the Victorian Parliament; and Ms. Ella Stinson, representing the Council.

The delegation provided a wonderful opportunity to strengthen parliamentary ties and foster mutual understanding between Australia and Japan.

The primary purpose of this delegation was to further the Council's mission of promoting international parliamentary exchange and cooperation among emerging political leaders. Japan, as a close ally and regional partner, offers a unique setting for discussions on both traditional and evolving areas of mutual interest – including trade, security and cultural understanding within the political process.

Through a series of high-level meetings, site visits, and dialogue, we deepened our knowledge of Japan's political landscape, exchanged views on issues relevant to both nations, and reinforced our commitment to a prosperous and stable Indo-Pacific region.

Japan is in a geopolitically strategic location within the Indo-Pacific, surrounded by important military and economic centres. A key focus is the role of the People's Republic of China within Asia and the wider globe.

Australia and Japan as close allies with mutual regional interests have maintained a strong economic relationship, notwithstanding changing trade dynamics.

Japan's National Security Strategy and Economic Security Promotion Act 2022 seeks to encompass the challenging security environment Japan faces, with the intention to obtain counterstrike capabilities, sentiments of a free and open Indo-Pacific and commitments to increase defence spending to 2% of GDP.

Day One – Saturday 19 October

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and Cenotaph for the Atomic Bomb Victims



The delegation arrived in Tokyo and transferred though to Hiroshima. An extensive tour of the Peace Memorial Museum for an extensive tour with Museum Director Mr Yoshifumi Ishida. The Museum showed in graphic detail, the lead up to, the day of the bombing and the aftermath. Through objects, testimonials and art, the impact of the bombing of Hiroshima was communicated to the many thousands of visitors who come on a weekly basis.

The Delegation was also honoured to visit and place wreaths at the Memorial Cenotaph for Atomic Bomb Victims in Hiroshima, a poignant experience. The talk from atomic bomb survivor Ms Sadae Kasaoka, was a moving and very fitting end to our day. Her vivid memories and strong commitment to communicating the importance of peace, encapsulated the meaning of the Peace Park complex.

Day 2 – Sunday 20 October

Miyajima Island and Shinkansen



On Sunday, the delegation toured Miyajima, a small island known for its world heritage listed Shinto temple complex and world famous *torii*, providing cultural insights and a very different glimpse of Japanese life.

The trip to Tokyo on the high-speed train, or Shinkansen, demonstrated the efficiency and quality of the Japanese rail transit system. The 800+ kilometre journey taking under 4 hours.

Day 3 – Monday 21 October

Mogami Class Frigate and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries



The highlight of the delegation was certainly crossing of Tokyo Bay on a Mogami Class frigate, which encompassed a detailed briefing by senior government officials, Japan Self-Defence personnel and representatives of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. This frigate is a part of bid process for the Australian Navy's new class of frigates. The openness and willingness of all present to provide as detailed an explanation as possible of the operational benefits and capabilities of the Mogami was greatly appreciated by the Delegation.

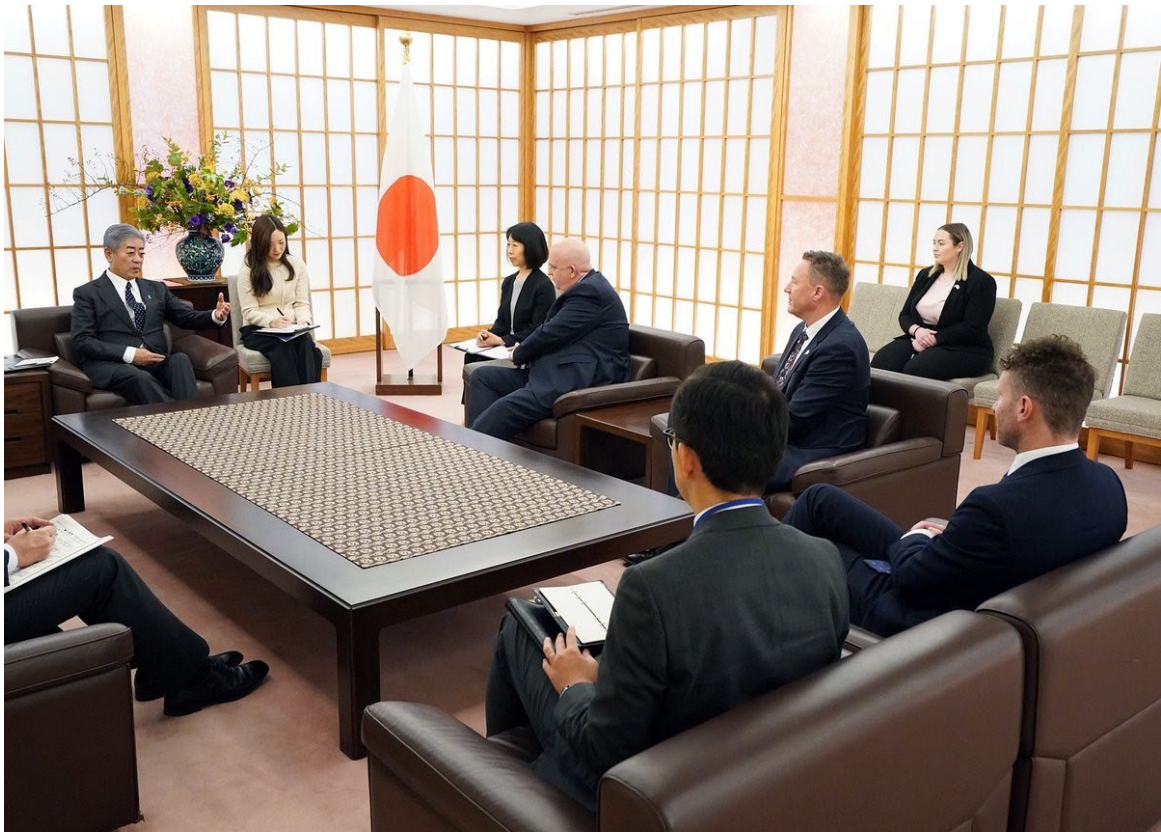
The briefing continued at the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Yokohama Shipyard, which included a virtual control centre of the Mogami class frigate, enabling testing, training and the integration of new technology. Once again, the expertise on display was remarkable, showcasing the strength of the shipbuilding process within Japanese industry.

Former Ambassador to Australia, Mr Sumio Kusaka

The delegation met former Ambassador to Australia, Mr Kusaka for a briefing on the geopolitical situation. The former Ambassador demonstrated a deep commitment to maintaining and strengthening the Japan-Australia relationship. He was generous both with his time and his willing to communicate his great depth of knowledge. Topics ranged across China, North Korea and Taiwan, to the upcoming US election.

Day 4 – Tuesday 22 October

Minister for Foreign Affairs



On the Tuesday the delegation met with Minister for Foreign Affairs Iwaya Takeshi, a consistent advocate for building Japan's defence capabilities and furthering the relationship with Australia. The delegation was grateful for the generous time provided by the Foreign Minister, given his recent appointment to the role and the imminent Japanese election. Topics covered included the bilateral relationship, the upcoming election in the USA, the geopolitical tensions in the region, and the upcoming Japanese election. Minister Iwaya also highlighted a number of potential opportunities for our nations to work more closely together, such as the role of gas in the energy transition.

Australian Embassy and Japan Institute for International Affairs



Claire Elias, Minister-Counsellor of Australian Embassy Tokyo, hosted the delegation for a lunch at the Australian Embassy. This gave a perfect ‘mid-visit’ opportunity to gain the Australian perspective of the issues we had been considering across a range of policy areas – defence, trade and investment.

This was followed by a discussion with Japan Institute for International Affairs hosted by Mr Kenichiro Sasae. Mr Sasae was a generous and engaging expert, revealing a wide range of knowledge in global affairs, the energy transition, the importance of trade routes between Japan and Australia, and potential future areas of conflict in the region.

Dinner with government officials

A very informative dinner hosted by Oceanian Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr Shintaro Kitagawa. The dinner included Member of the House of Councillors, Mr Iwao Horii. The discussion was wide ranging across all aspects of the Japan-Australia relationship. It was a highly informative end to a very constructive day.

Day 5 – Wednesday 23 October

Imperial Palace

Wednesday began with a walk through the beautiful gardens and grounds of the Imperial Palace complex. This peaceful oasis in the heart of busy Tokyo is clearly enjoyed by many locals and tourists alike.

Nagareyama Otaka Forest and Meeting Mayor Izaki Yoshiharu



A tour of the Nagareyama Otaka Forest area, with an emphasis on urban development and housing, highlighted the importance of urban renewal. The area was the fastest growing in Japan, including having the highest birthrate for a number of years. The tour highlighted the importance of interconnectedness of family life, education and transportation links.

The Mayor of Nagareyama was justifiably proud of the record of growth and the integration of redevelopment in the area, and was keen to point out that there was still much more to do.

Daiwa House factory tour



The delegation visited the modular housing production facility of Daiwa House. This massive pre-fabricated housing production facility, stretching over 4 huge factory buildings, was eye-opening in its scale and efficiency. The relative low staff numbers, integration of robotics, standardised materials, allowed for just-in-time manufacturing and customisation at scale. The ability to produce over 40 modular houses in one work shift is quite remarkable.

Day 6 – Thursday 24 October

National Diet of Japan and Briefing with Mr Sahashi Ryo



On the Thursday, the last day of the delegation, we enjoyed a tour of the National Diet, the House of Councillors, which had an incredible air of dignity consistent with being the political centre of the nation. With extensive committee rooms, chambers and sprawling halls, the Diet shared much in common with the Australian Parliament whilst also being uniquely Japanese.

Following the tour the Delegation met with Associate Professor Mr Sahashi Ryo from the Institute for Advanced Studies in Asia. The Professor discussed a range of topics, from energy security to the geo-politics of the region.

Conclusion

The delegation would like to afford particular thanks to Ms Kanako Shiga from the International Hospitality and Conference Service Association, who was our constant support and guide. The delegation is also extraordinarily grateful for the assistance of Ms Ella Stinson from the Australian Political Exchange Council. Both of their expertise was invaluable in making the trip engaging, enjoyable and efficient.

The delegation also thanks our various translators for their assistance with the language barrier, and our dedicated drivers for efficient transporting our delegation.

Overall, this was a successful delegation which provided incredible elucidation of the importance of the Australian-Japanese relations; spanning bilateral and multilateral relations, economic and trade partnerships, military capabilities and shared interests. Every activity, meeting and visit gave insight into the future opportunities of these two great nations.