

# Newsletter

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*Greetings!* It is soon the end of March, a time for some to embark on a new journey in Japan. This year we say goodbye to our Deputy Executive Director and five Assistant Directors who are returning to their original organisations. Below are the farewell messages from each one of them.

*CLAIR Sydney wishes them all the best!*

## Farewell messages

### Sayoko Koizumi

Deputy Executive Director from Nagoya City

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who has been involved over the past two years. Living outside Japan has given me valuable insight into how Australians approach society and politics, while also allowing me to see Japan from a fresh, external perspective.

When I first moved to Australia, I had no prior experience in international relations at the local government level, nor had I studied abroad before. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to live here. I believe Australians genuinely understand the value of multiculturalism. Whenever I explain something or ask a



question, people listen attentively without interrupting, making a genuine effort to understand my perspective. And they say “No worries” at the end. It is also common here for people to pre-emptively apologise when they anticipate accidentally bumping into someone or causing any inconvenience. In Japan, it’s often said that in foreign country the first person to apologise “loses”, but here in Australia, there is a deeply ingrained culture of consideration for others, creating an environment where people from diverse backgrounds can live comfortably.

During my time here, I made running along the seaside a part of my morning routine, and grew to love the coastal walks. It was truly enriching to exchange greetings with the friendly Australians I passed by. While I ran marathons in Japan, it was in Australia that I truly discovered my love for the outdoors. I will always cherish the memories of the lush greenery, the birds, and the athletic Australians I had the pleasure of running and walking alongside.

My successor, who will be coming from Nagoya—the same city I hail from—will be taking over my role. Thank you once again for your support, and I am looking forward to seeing the continued success of CLAIR Sydney.



## Hideaki Ota

### Assistant Director from Odawara City

The time has come to bid farewell to Australia, and these two years have flown by in the blink of an eye.

During my time at CLAIR, I had the privilege of working with many dedicated local government professionals and councillors. These interactions offered invaluable insights and continuous inspiration. Each community faces its own unique challenges, from housing and waste management to disaster preparedness and recovery. It was truly rewarding to exchange ideas and perspectives while incorporating Japan's experiences into the conversation. I am deeply grateful to everyone I had the pleasure of meeting along the way.

My children have been the ones who have truly benefited from Australia's incredible natural environment. Growing up in such a multicultural society, they forged lasting friendships and had experiences beyond anything I could have imagined. Who could have predicted that my child would be learning Mandarin in an English-speaking country?

Leaving Australia, my second home, fills me with a sense of bittersweetness. Yet, I will carry these experiences with me into the future. If you ever find yourself in Japan, please do reach out—I'll be waiting for you in Odawara, just 40 minutes from Tokyo!



## Tomoyuki Takemura

### Assistant Director from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone I have met in Australia and New Zealand.

Thanks to all your support, I had a wonderful time over the past two years, living and working in Sydney, which opened me to many incredible experiences as I spent time during my leave visiting every state and internal territory in Australia and both main islands in New Zealand.

My life in Australia started with a ruptured Achilles tendon about two weeks after



my arrival. I was very depressed when I had the injury, but this was a blessing in disguise as I had the opportunity to experience first-hand the wonderful hospitality and accessibility Australia offers to the physically impaired.

The Australian public were always quick to help when they saw me on crutches. I also noticed that there were many people, even with injuries, out and about enjoying their daily lives, and that a lot of the public places and events had good accessibility for the physically impaired offering all



people a 'fair go' to enjoy the fullness of life.

At CLAIR Sydney, I was very impressed with the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme Alumni Association's activities and the members' continuing passion for Japan even after their return, which is the foundational drive of their efforts.

Through business trips and running booths at Japan-related events, I learned just how many people were interested



in visiting Japan and many of those who had visited Japan shared stories of their wonderful experiences in Japan with me. In addition, I realised that it is the numerous people who have been and will be involved in grassroots activities that builds bridges between Japan and the two countries (Australia and New Zealand).

Today, online tools and internet searches are well developed, but these experiences of seeing things with my own eyes will definitely be an advantage for me when working in Japan in the future.

Recently, population decline and the possibility of municipalities ceasing to exist in the future are often discussed in Japan.

Considering this situation, my visit to the Shire of East Pilbara, Western Australia, which is the largest council in Australia and covers roughly the same size as Japan by a single council with a population of around 10,000, gave me some insight for the future of local governments in Japan. I cannot thank enough Steven Harding, Susan Abouav, Steven Gould and the many other staff at the Shire for their contribution on the visit, and Candy Choo from LGPAWA.



Looking back on personal changes over the past two years, I have noticed that while I did not really like my first name before coming to Sydney, now I have come to accept it because I came up with the nickname 'Tom' for the people I meet in Australia and New Zealand and they were happy that I had a name that was easy to remember. I have also grown in my fascination with nature and animals more than I imagined, and I spent a lot of time stopping to look at wild birds, which bothered my wife.

My motivation for coming to CLAIR Sydney was doing whatever I could to get away from the busy days in Japan, and though I am anxious to go back, I am now able to return to those days with enthusiasm. Over the past two years, I have been able to see the good points of Australia and New Zealand and understand where Japan can catch up more, as well as the good points of Japan that the two countries do not have. I am not sure if I will be able to put what I've learned over the past two years to good use in the department I will be working in from April, but I would like to do my best if I have the opportunity in the future.

As a member of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, I would like to make Japan a country that people who have been involved with me will continue to find attractive - and even more so.

I wish everyone all the best and hope to see you again.



## Reiko Kunisaki

Assistant Director from Fukuoka Prefecture

Dear everyone who made my time in Sydney so special,

Thank you all for your incredible support over the past two years.

During my time in Sydney, I had the honour of working on various projects that strengthened the connection between my hometown, Fukuoka, and Australia. These included [Fukuoka Prefectural Governor's visit to New South Wales](#), which featured the Cowra Breakout 80th anniversary commemoration ceremony, [a student business programme](#) organised with the Sydney Fukuoka Prefectural Association, [a tourism seminar](#) hosted by the Fukuoka Prefecture Tourism Association, and sports camps for young athletes in collaboration with [Baseball](#) NSW and [Swimming](#) NSW. None of these achievements would have been possible without the generous support of so many people, for which I am truly grateful.



Of course, my time here wasn't just about work. During the holidays, my husband and I travelled across Australia and beyond, immersing ourselves in its beautiful nature and rich culture. One of the most unforgettable experiences was swag camping under the starry sky at Uluru. A memory I will cherish forever. I am deeply grateful to my dispatching department, Fukuoka, and CLAIR for assigning me abroad and giving me such incredible experiences.

At the same time, I often found myself missing my hometown, Fukuoka. The fresh seafood and delicious, affordable food (especially tonkotsu ramen, which was born in Fukuoka!), the super accessible airport, cozy beaches, scenic hiking trails, seasonal flowers, hot springs, and vibrant traditional festivals— I have truly longed for them all.

As bittersweet as it is to leave Australia, I now look forward to the day I can welcome everyone I have met here to Fukuoka. Once again, thank you all for your kindness and support. I hope to see you again in Fukuoka!



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## *Kana Tsujiwaki*

### *Assistant Director from Wakayama Prefecture*

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone I have met in Australia and New Zealand. Over the past two years, I have been incredibly fortunate to receive so much support, kindness, and encouragement. My experience working in Australia has truly been life-changing, offering me countless opportunities to meet wonderful people and gain invaluable experiences—both professionally and personally.

In my first year at CLAIR Sydney, I was primarily responsible for matters related to the JET Programme. Thanks to this role, I had the privilege of traveling across Australia and New Zealand and connecting with many JETAA members. This was one of the greatest highlights of my time here, and I sincerely appreciate the dedication of JETAA members in strengthening ties between Japan and Australia/New Zealand, even after completing the programme. One particularly memorable personal experience was organising a Japanese calligraphy workshop in collaboration with the JETAA NSW chapter. As a grand master of Japanese calligraphy, sharing the beauty of this art form abroad had long been an aspiration of mine, and I am truly grateful for the opportunity to make it a reality.



In my second year, I had the honour of organising a week-long Multicultural Seminar in Melbourne. This programme provided staff from Japanese local governments and other relevant organisations with a unique chance to learn about Australia's pioneering multicultural policies and practices. I was proud to welcome our largest group of attendees to date. Leading a project of this scale for the first time was a challenging yet rewarding experience, and I am incredibly grateful for the passion and enthusiasm of all the participants, which made the seminar so impactful. A special thank you to the organisations that generously hosted us, shared best practices, and provided such a welcoming environment.

Beyond my professional work, I was fortunate to serve as a board member of AJS NSW (Australia-Japan Society of NSW) during the latter part of my tenure. I have always been amazed by the deep interest and appreciation so many Australians have for Japanese culture. Through these interactions, I was often reminded of the many wonderful aspects of Japan, seen through the eyes of those who cherish it.

I truly love living in Australia, and there are still so many things I would love to do here. I explored every possibility to extend my stay, but unfortunately, I must now return to Japan. However, my connection with Australia and New Zealand will not end here. I will continue to cherish the friendships and networks I have built and remain committed to strengthening the bond between our countries.

Thank you all for making my time here so special. I will carry these memories with me always, and I sincerely hope our paths cross again in the future.



## Shinnosuke Matsumoto

Assistant Director from Ichihara City

I am truly grateful for the past two years at CLAIR Sydney and for the support I have received from so many people. I sincerely appreciate the connections I have made with everyone I met in Australia and New Zealand.

During these two years, I had the opportunity to be involved in various projects, including the JET Programme and providing support for the overseas visits of various Japanese local government officials. My interactions with JETAA members were particularly memorable. At the JETAA Oceania Conference, I had the opportunity to hear the views of various members from different chapters and learned a lot from the discussions.

I was also fortunate to support inbound tourism promotion and strengthen connections between Japanese local governments and communities in Australia and New Zealand. Visiting different regions and speaking directly with local people who have an interest in Japan was an invaluable experience.

On a personal level, I enjoyed immersing myself in the local culture and lifestyle, creating many wonderful memories. Weekend trips, relaxing with a great cup of coffee, and experiencing unique local foods—these are all things I will never forget.

As I prepare to return to Japan, I will continue to cherish the experiences I have had and the connections I have made in Australia and New Zealand. Thank you all very much. I look forward to seeing you again somewhere in the future!



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