

## SUMMARY

### 30 years of Australia-Japan relations

Bruce Miller

*Minister-Counsellor (Political), Australian Embassy Tokyo is a career diplomat with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Throughout his 20-year career, Mr Miller has seen overseas postings in Japan (twice) and Tehran, and assignments in Australia covering international legal and regional security issues, including, just before his current appointment to Japan, responsibility for Australia's relations with Japan, the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.*

As Prime Minister Howard said during his visit to Australia in April this year "old friends are good friends". Over the past thirty years, Japan as a nation has gone from strength to strength. And Australia has been a close partner, with the bilateral relationship growing stronger and closer each year.

The 1957 ratification of a bilateral Commerce Agreement, only 12 years after World War II ended, paved the way for the close and complementary trade and economic relationship that we enjoy today to our mutual benefit.

Japan's importance as Australia's largest economic partner remains undiminished. In 2004 Australian exports to our largest market, Japan, were valued at AUD25.6 billion. Japan has been Australia's largest export market for decades.

Currently, Australia and Japan are conducting an FTA feasibility study. Even two years ago this was unthinkable. Although it is not a guarantee to enter formal negotiation of an FTA, the study itself is a big step forward. It demonstrates a recognition of the strength of the bilateral relationship.

Australia and Japan share a common outlook on many regional and international issues and cooperate closely on them.

The decision to deploy Australian troops to Iraq to help maintain the security environment in which Japan's Self Defence Force can continue reconstruction work in al-Muthanna Province is something that could not have been predicted even 10 years ago. It is a practical demonstration of our two countries' common strategic interests and objectives.

Australia warmly welcomes Japan's increasingly active role in maintaining international peace and security. During his April 2005 visit to Japan, Prime Minister Howard reiterated Australia's support for Japan's claim for permanent membership of the UN Security Council. There is no single country that has a greater claim to be a new permanent member of the Security Council than Japan.

As important allies of the United States, we have a shared interest in maintaining strong US engagement as the bedrock of regional stability. And we are working together to ensure a peaceful resolution of the North Korea nuclear issue, and proper handling of the abductees issue.

There is no stronger partner for Australia in the region than Japan

Japan has given strong support for Australia's participation in regional forums-including the inaugural East Asia Summit to be held in Kuala Lumpur this December.

The bilateral relationship is at a high point and the period ahead provides an opportunity for further growth and enhanced cooperation spanning security, strategic, trade, economic and community linkages.

2006 is the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, and of the establishment of

the Australia-Japan Foundation. It has been designated as the Japan-Australia Year of Exchange. This is an opportunity to enhance further our strong bilateral links, including at grass roots level.