

42nd Australia-Japan Joint Business Conference
10th – 12th October, 2004, The Sofitel Hotel, Melbourne

04JBC-HM-Chairmen'sShortSummary

Chairmen's Summary

(Short Version read in Closing Session)

Mr Hugh M Morgan AC, President of the Australia-Japan Business Co-operation Committee (AJBCC) chaired the conference and Mr Takashi Imai AC, Chairman of the Japan Business Co-operation Committee (JABCC) was his Co-Chairman.

The Chairs welcomed the 131 person JABCC and the 120 person AJBCC delegations to the 42nd Australia-Japan Joint Business Conference – the sixth to be conducted in Melbourne over the history of the organizations. In response to the challenges generated in a time of rapid change such as experienced in the six years since the 1998 conference in Melbourne, it was concluded that the reform spirit is alive and well in both countries. There was great confidence about the prospects for the future.

These 'Opening Remarks' were followed by 'Messages' from Prime Ministers John Howard and Junichiro Koizumi read respectively by their Ambassadors Mr John McCarthy AO and Mr Kenzo Oshima.

The conference benefited from the expertise and perceptions of twenty eight speakers, panellists and commentators who were thanked for their most generous offering of time towards preparation and participation. Similarly thanked were the Chairs and Co-Chairs of the seven Plenary Sessions who skilfully guided proceedings to the success achieved. Also thanked were the nine presenters who impressed us with their innovative products, technologies and systems during the Technology Exposition session.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is impossible in a few minutes to do justice to the superb information and insights generated over the seven plenary sessions. A detailed summary is being prepared and will be forwarded to each delegate. It will also be added to the AJBCC's web-site. At this time we wish to identify, without any inherent ranking, a small number of the more prominent matters that arose:-

1. The increasing impact of China's expanding economy for the world and bilaterally to Australia and Japan was frequently referenced amongst speakers and during Q&A sessions. The impact on the reliable supply of resources to the expanding Japanese economy was often the focus of the concern.
2. It was important for Australia and Japan to work together not only to expand bilateral co-operation but also to jointly explore opportunities in new areas of business that would increase the integration of East Asian countries. As the most advanced economies in the region, Australia and Japan have a role in providing leadership in the region by supporting stable and strong financial foundations for an integrated Asia.
3. The rapid growth of international trade has dramatically impacted the different modes of transport and support infrastructure:
 - shipping tonnages are well below demand levels so rates are at an all time high;

- port infrastructures are not keeping pace with requirements and significant increases in charges have followed.
- airport facilities in some localities need immediate additional attention.

In respect to Australia's performance, it was proposed that the Commonwealth Government be encouraged to undertake a greater integration role in ensuring the availability of facilities for current and future needs although such have historically been the primary responsibility of the States.

4. Representatives of both business communities expressed apprehension at the impact of the demographic structures on their respective countries. It was noted that the issues now engaging attention in Japan were of more immediate impact on that community than in Australia but that if conditions remained as at present, Australia's future demographic structures may well parallel those of Japan but delayed by about 15 years.

A Japanese representative expressed support for examination of the constructive immigration programme procedures that had been adopted in Australia from which they may draw pertinent considerations for themselves.

5. The impact and rate of change in the retail sector influenced the delivery of goods to the customer and the total supply chain. Enhancement issues such as Australia's capacity to meet maximum food and safety requirements represented expanded trading opportunities.

6. The Trade & Economic Framework (TEF) negotiations were reported to the meeting as proceeding as per the timetable. To date, formal bilateral arrangements also had been achieved with respect to six of the eleven areas of trade facilitation identified in the TEF. There is a confidence that a meaningful outcome would be achieved.

The AJBCC and JABCC maintained their aspiration for these enhancement activities to culminate in a Comprehensive Economic Partnership that includes a Free Trade Agreement and called upon the negotiators to be ambitious in their consideration of the bilateral trade negotiations.

A more detailed Chairmen's Summary is to be found on www.ajbcc.asn.au ■