

sustainable japan

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Chamber's Townsend bridges Japan, Australia, N.Z.

Roundtable

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The recent sit-down between Sally Townsend, chair of the Australian and New Zealand Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ANZCCJ), and Ross Rowbury at the 32nd Roundtable was a conversation about diversifying the two countries' images and avoiding complacency in their relationships with Japan. The pair also discussed the role that Australians and New Zealanders who are long-term residents of Japan can play in driving exchanges and access to opportunities.

Townsend herself assumed her current position as the South Australian government's regional director for Japan and South Korea after nearly two decades living in Japan. She first came here as a high school exchange student, then again later on to teach English for a year.

"I went to London on a working holiday visa, and after two years I went back to Adelaide," South Australia's capital. "As much as I love Adelaide, for someone in their early 20s, I was still eager to do something different. So I thought, 'I'll go to Japan. I've studied Japanese, it'll be great.'" Finding herself in the middle of the hot and very humid Tokyo summer, and with her Japanese-language skills not being as good as she thought, Townsend second-guessed her decision of moving countries, but she was still committed to the challenge. She enrolled in a Japanese school during the mornings while working as an English teacher at night. "I fin-

ished the Japanese course and decided to go on to do a university degree in Japan. And I am still here, 23 years later."

Having previously worked in the wine industry, Townsend has first-hand knowledge of just how well known products such as Australian beef and premium wine are in Japan. However, the 650-member-strong chamber of commerce has been working on adding new dimensions to the awareness of Australia beyond primary industries, and diversifying its own membership and initiatives. That has meant encouraging more women to also run for elections to the executive council. It has also meant establishing new committees, resulting in an executive council that has also incorporated members of varying backgrounds who better represent the diversity of the membership, beyond the conventional "lawyers and bankers."

The chamber recently established a Sustainability Committee and a TIER Committee (tech, innovation, education and research) in order to leverage the number of Australian universities coming to Japan looking for R&D opportunities and partnerships, and tech companies and startups looking at entering the Japanese market. "We try and see where there are opportunities to assist companies," she said.

Townsend pointed out that many Australian startups are coming to Tokyo in December for this year's Innovation Leaders Summit, a Tokyo Metropolitan Government initiative.

The summit, conducted by Project Nippon Co. Ltd., is Asia's largest open innovation



Sally Townsend, chair of the Australian and New Zealand Chamber of Commerce in Japan
YUICO TAIYA

conference, matching hundreds of startups from all over the world, with support from Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. Organizations like the ANZCCJ provide support and market exposure to the startups that participate.

As South Australia's regional director, Townsend's job involves attracting Japanese and South Korean investment into the state and finding trade partners in both markets for South Australian producers. Townsend said that in a project partially financed by Japan's Ministry of the Environment, Marubeni Corp. will export the world's cheapest "green" hydrogen to Indonesia from Adelaide starting next year.

Overall, however, while Japan has enjoyed good relations with Australia and New Zealand, more can still be done to improve general knowledge of Japan. Additionally, there is the danger of this relationship leading to complacency amid an atmosphere of competition from other countries.

"One of our (ANZCCJ) roles definitely is to showcase and build a greater spotlight on what's happening with Japan and on Australians and New Zealanders and what they're doing in Japan. Australians don't know what's going on with Japanese companies in Australia. I mean, Mitsui, for example — I think they're one of the largest taxpayers in Australia; it's a Japanese company. And Australians

don't know what Australians are doing in Japan. It's down to activities that we do — conversations like this, for example, really building the profile in showing the attractiveness of Japan beyond manga and anime, but leveraging that initial attraction," Townsend said.

At the same time, improving Japanese education in Australia, even with competition from other Asian languages, in particular, is important. Initiatives like the homestay program that brought her to Japan as a teenager, in which she stayed with the family of a student who had stayed with her family in Adelaide, are crucial. Maybe because of such early contact with Japan, or simply because of geography, Townsend said she has never felt far from home during her time in Japan.

A similar level of comfort is probably evident in the relationship between New Zealand and Australia and Japan, but Townsend warns that this can be disadvantageous.

"I think that the danger with Australia and New Zealand is that we do become complacent. We think, 'Oh, this is great because our relationship is fantastic.' Particularly around geopolitics, we have to work together well. And we will do so more in energy and defense. But we can't just expect that we can come over and share a wine and 'Isn't this great?' and everything's going to be hunky-dory. We have to work a lot harder. We're seeing that really in the new energy space; Japan has incredibly ambitious decarbonization goals, and they have to be met in the very near future, so Australia is like, 'Oh! We can help you.' But so can Saudi Arabia, so can Canada, so can the United States, so can Chile. We just have to remember that a lot of the time we have competitors, and I think we have to work a bit harder."

Some of that work also has to do with widening perceptions of Japan. More travel has dispelled certain ideas about Japan, such as an absence of services in English and high prices for everything. In addition, initiatives like the Innovation Leaders Summit show that the Japanese side is working hard to



Townsend was first elected chair of the chamber in November 2018 and is now in her third term. YUICO TAIYA

build the flow of talent and ideas into the country.

The chamber's own Young Generations Program provides students and young professionals with networking, internship and career development chances within the ANZCCJ community. During COVID, virtual platforms made this opportunity available to university students in Australia and New Zealand who had interest in Japan, either because they were studying Japanese or International Business.

Through interview-style sessions, the students and young professionals got the opportunity to be introduced to "the faces of the chamber," in which they talked to members of the chamber and discovered more about the members' journeys, what led them to Japan and their current roles.

"I don't want to say 'COVID was great' because it was pretty terrible for a lot of people, but it did provide wonderful opportunities to virtually connect with talented and motivated people in Australia and New Zealand, and that was a great chance for us to talk about how fantastic Japan is and the opportunities people may have if they were to come over," Townsend said.

Roundtable is a monthly series of English-language events organized by The Japan Times Cube. For more information visit <https://sustainable.japantimes.com/roundtable>



Townsend was joined by a diverse audience looking forward to learning more about cooperation between Japan and Australia and New Zealand. YUICO TAIYA

Times Gallery



U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel, spouse Amy Rule and Liberal Democratic Party Secretary-General Toshimitsu Motegi kick off the 2023 Independence Day Reception with a hearty "kanpai" at the ambassador's residence in Tokyo on June 29. U.S. EMBASSY TOKYO



State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shunsuke Takei (left), economy minister Yasutoshi Nishimura and Bolivian Charge d'Affaires Natalia Salazar stand at the commemoration of the 198th anniversary of Bolivia's independence. EMBASSY OF BOLIVIA



The Czech Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan, with the support of the Czech Embassy in Tokyo, organized the "15th Czech Business & Culture Networking Event" at the Czech Embassy on July 20. Almost 80 guests attended. CCCJ



Brazilian Agriculture Minister Carlos Favaro gives a news conference on July 28 during his trip to Japan to promote Brazilian agribusiness. EMBASSY OF BRAZIL



Yuki Ishikawa, the star volleyball player for Powervolley Milano, is announced as the new brand ambassador for the Italian pillow company Fabe at the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan. ITALIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN JAPAN (ICCJ)



Dairon Ojeda (right), second secretary of the Embassy of Cuba, and students from Hiroshima's Honkawa Elementary School dedicate 1,000 paper cranes from a Cuban elementary school to the Children's Peace Monument in Hiroshima. ASAHI



Employees from MacDermid Performance Solutions Japan K.K. team up to clean up Hachimanyama no Yokan park in Hiratsuka, Kanagawa Prefecture. JULIAN BASHORE



The Entrepreneur Organization's Tokyo Metropolitan chapter board member Yohei Otsuka (rear left, gray shirt) holds an international family event together with a Japanese sushi chef. EOTM

PRI's global ESG investing talks in Tokyo to tackle 'sense of crisis'

ESG/SDGs

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The leading global conference on responsible investment will be held in Tokyo for the first time this fall, focusing on what investors can do to make society sustainable at a time when many industries are struggling to meet their targets for combating climate change.

The event, PRI in Person, is the 15th annual conference by Principles for Responsible Investment, a U.N.-backed network of institutional investors. Responsible investment is an approach that takes environment, social and governance (ESG) factors into account. This meeting, the first in Asia in seven years, will be held from Oct. 3 to 5. Over 1,000 delegates are expected to attend, with asset owners, investment managers and policymakers discussing ESG issues and sharing the latest developments.

"We are running out of time," said Takeshi Kimura, a special adviser to the board for Nippon Life Insurance Co., the lead sponsor for the Tokyo event. "Not only PRI but other global institutions share the same sense of crisis that the world has not at all narrowed the gap between its goals and the reality."

Kimura said that although financial institutions and companies have made pledges to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases after a series of global goals were adopted, the progress has been far from satisfactory, and so the conference's theme will be

"Moving from commitments to action."

In 2015, the United Nations adopted 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) designed to end poverty and hunger and avert climate change. In the same year, the U.N.'s conference on climate change adopted the Paris Agreement, a legally binding international treaty.

Kimura said he hopes the conference can provide participants with suggestions on how to take specific actions to reach their goals.

Many investors have strong aspirations but are not sure what to do, he said. According to a PRI Board survey of signatory organizations conducted earlier this year, 63% of the 1,487 respondents believed that for them, responsible investing will in the future involve taking action on real-world outcomes in addition to managing ESG risks, higher than the 41% who said they were doing so already.

Kimura also said the current backlash against ESG investing by some Americans is not likely to affect the overall trend: "So far, the number of U.S. institutions applying to the conference has been by far larger than those in other countries. I don't think investors will back off or stop moving forward because of the anti-ESG movements in the U.S."

Media reports said in June that BlackRock chief executive Larry Fink had stopped using the term "ESG," saying it had become too politicized. Yet Fink, an active leader on adopting ESG standards, also said the world's largest asset manager hadn't changed its stance on ESG issues.

Another major topic that will likely be a focus of the Tokyo conference is biodiversity. Like with climate change and human rights, PRI plans to launch an initiative for preserving nature and biological diversity. The initiative's objective is to promote collaboration among investors so that it can contribute to the goal of halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030. Its initial focus will be on forest loss and land degradation, as a key driver of biodiversity loss, Kimura said.

In 2017, PRI launched an investor-led



COSUFI

initiative called Climate Action 100+ to prompt large corporate emitters of greenhouse gases to take steps against climate change. PRI is also developing a stewardship initiative, Advance, for institutional investors to work together and take action on human rights and social issues.

Kimura said that one of the specific missions of the lead sponsor of the Tokyo conference is to help many participants understand that there is no one-size-fits-all decarbonization financing approach that can be applied across all regions. "Industry mix, energy mix and social structures differ between Asia and the West. The transition to a climate-resilient net-zero economy will require the adoption of a holistic approach appropriate to each country, taking into account the social implications on workers, communities and consumers. "In order to close the funding gap between what is needed to decarbonize Asia and what has been procured, it is essential that Western investors gain a better understanding of Asia's regional specificities."

Nippon Life plans to invite plenary panelists and Asian policymakers to its booth for deeper discussions. "I hope stakeholders from Asia, the U.S. and Europe can exchange their opinions to reach the global goals of net-zero emissions," he said.

Nippon Life is a member of the Sustainable Japan Network, a group of companies that cooperate with this newspaper in spreading information about sustainability in Japan. You can also be part of the network; scan the QR code for more details.



Takeshi Kimura, special adviser to the board for Nippon Life Insurance Co. COSUFI

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