

2026 Emperor's Birthday Reception: Remarks by Ambassador Osawa

(26 March 2026)

- Honourable Minister Tama Potaka;
- Mr Grahame Morton, the representative of the New Zealand Government for this reception and Deputy Secretary of the Americas and Asia Group;
- Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

Ladies and gentlemen, we are extremely delighted to celebrate the 66th birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan Naruhito, the symbol of the State and of the Unity of the People of Japan, together with our long-standing Pacific friend and an important partner, Aotearoa New Zealand. Thank you for joining us today.

Ladies and gentlemen, the close relations between our two nations have continued to grow and prosper more than ever, and would like to thank the New Zealand Government, who has put in a lot of effort to maintain and strengthen our "Strategic Cooperative Partnership", including various types of ministerial meetings and defence cooperation. Now, I am pleased to inform you of good news for our relationship with New Zealand. First, according to a survey in December by the Asia New Zealand Foundation, Japan is ranked the second most trusted country for New Zealand, just after Australia. Second, in 2025, Kiwi visitors to Japan reached 136,875, 45.5% higher than pre-Covid levels.

Japanese visitor numbers to New Zealand are also recovering, reaching the same level as pre-Covid despite the very weak exchange rate of Yen.

These figures reflect the strong affinity that New Zealanders have for Japan, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all New Zealanders who have contributed to strengthening our economic ties and cultural exchanges, and who continue to cherish Japan's natural beauty, safety, rich traditions and renowned cuisine.

Ladies and gentlemen, the global situation is becoming increasingly uncertain. Based on our strong mutual trust, we like-minded countries need to update, deepen and enlarge our political, economic and cultural ties. I hosted a business seminar last week in Auckland which came up with ideas for new areas of cooperation, such as renewable energies and hydrogen. In addition, a Copernican shift in our way of cooperation, like the direct investment by New Zealand companies into Japan for sharing the creative ideas of New Zealand startups. I will continue to support this collaboration.

To conclude, I would like to again thank everyone here. Special thanks to Air New Zealand, Green Collar, Tatsumi NZ and LION who contributed to today's event through opening booths here or providing products. I would like to thank my Embassy staff who helped with the preparations, including preparing delicious Japanese food for you. Today we are honoured to offer a delightful culinary experience, *Shabu-shabu*, a Japanese hot pot dish using Wagyu, being cooked right in front of you.

Please enjoy!

E nga ri kua mutu nga Korero.

No rei ra, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.