

## **Australian government officials pay their first visit to Tokamachi; praise Australia House for its high standard of art**

(Full translation from *the Niigata Nippou Shimbun*, 31 July 2010)

On July 30, a delegation of Australian government officials visited Tokamachi City for the first time to learn about the challenges which Japanese local communities face and the measures they have implemented. During their stay, the officials from Australia visited terraced paddy fields and the Australia House, an art project created for the E-T Art Triennial in Urada. In the Urada region in Tokamachi, where the installation of the Australia House was completed with the cooperation of the Australian Embassy last year, delegation members had a chance to talk with people from the local community directly and hear about their lives in the mountainside villages.

The delegation was comprised of 17 senior officials from both the Federal Government and State Governments, who were in charge of areas such as agriculture and welfare. The officials arrived in Japan on July 27, spending 20 days in total in Japan and Malaysia, studying local cultures, politics and economic issues.

Upon their arrival in Tokamachi, the delegates visited terraced paddy fields in the Matsudai Pass as well as the Australia House, and were impressed by the unique idea of transforming an abandoned rustic farmhouse into an art installation. In Urada, they attended a luncheon at the community centre, where the local citizens explained to them about the history of the region and their snow-bound lifestyle in the winter.

"It is surprising to find artworks of such high standards in a rural region. We have common ground as similar efforts are being made in Australia. We look forward to a more active exchange with Urada", commented the leader of the delegation, Professor Peter Drysdale, Emeritus Professor of International Economics at the Australian National University.

The delegation then moved on to visit the City Hall and had a meeting with Tokamachi Mayor Yoshifumi Sekiguchi before heading to Kanazawa City.