

Delegation from Australia visits Tokamachi; hopes for further Japan-Australia exchanges among younger generations

(Full translation from *the Tsunan Shimbun*, 6 August 2010)

On 30 July 2010, the Leading Australia's Future in Asia Program (LAFIA) delegation, consisting of 17 senior officials from the Federal Government and State Governments of Australia, paid a visit to Tokamachi City. The delegation visited the Australia House in Matsunoyama, Urada, and talked with the local residents. Japan and Australia have been deepening exchanges through the Echigo-Tsumari Art Festival held in this region. The delegation also called on Tokamachi Mayor Yoshifumi Sekiguchi in the City Hall, and both Mr Sekiguchi and members of the delegation expressed their wishes for further, deeper exchanges among young people of the two countries.

The delegation from Australia consisted of 17 members, including senior officials of both the Federal Government and State Governments and Agencies as well as professors at the Australian National University. The senior executives visited Matsudai Nobutai, one of the main staging grounds for the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, and enjoyed the view of terraced paddy fields in Urada. Then the delegation paid a visit to the Australia House, which was established as part of the fourth Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial in 2009, and members had a chance to talk with local residents over a lunch.

At their meeting, Tokamachi Mayor Yoshifumi Sekiguchi talked about the significance of the Australia House, saying that Urada still had cultural beauty lost in other parts of Japan, and the country needed to restore these lost traditions. The mayor explained that many people from outside liked the region and moved there, and he said he was very pleased that more people were choosing to live in Urada.

Hank Jongen, one of the delegation members and General Manager of Centrelink, an Australian Government statutory agency that operates social security programs, told Mr Sekiguchi that Urada had a beautiful scenery and friendly people, and it was a place full of charm. With a firm handshake with the mayor, Jongen said that he would like to come back here again, and he hoped many Australians would come to visit Urada just like many Japanese people visited Ayers Rock.