New Zealand Waitangi Day

Building a true partnership in the Asia-Pacific

Ian Kennedy
AMBASSADOR OF NEW ZEALAND

Waitangi Day is regarded by many as New Zealand's National Day. It commemorates the signing in 1840 of the Treaty of Waitangi between the British government and chiefs from New Zealand's native Maori tribes. New Zealanders around the world mark this important date in our young history, and use it as a time to reflect on who we are as a people and a nation.

Over the years, The Japan Times has very kindly recognized the significance of the day by generously providing space for New Zealand ambassadors to include a message to readers. It is my pleasure to continue this tradition. I would like to take this opportunity also to extend very warm greetings to all New Zealanders and our friends in Japan.

Our rich historical tapestry sits against a background of two predominant cultures — Maori and British — but New Zealand is now a multicultural nation built on the basis of that partnership. On Waitangi Day we reflect on the development of our nation as we share the good will and optimism that defines the New Zealander of today.

Many people from all over the world have chosen to make New Zealand their home because of the promise that it holds. Whether they came by oceangoing "waka" or by sailing ship, or later by air, they all came in search of a better life and to live in peace. Mark Twain once described New Zealand as a country settled by "people who stopped off on their way to heaven thinking they had arrived."

Today New Zealand is very much an Asia-Pacific nation and our relationship with Japan is among the most important we have with any country. Our connections span over 150 years during which New Zealanders and Japanese have worked together in many fields based on common values and shared interests to the benefit of both countries, and the wider world.

New Zealand's trade with Japan is substantial and strong, based on complementary economies. Japan is the world's biggest food importer and New Zealand is one of the world's leading exporters of high-quality, safe food products. Traditionally, the Japan-New Zealand trade relationship has been characterized by New Zealand sales to Japan of food and commodities, and Japanese sales to New Zealand of industrial goods, especially cars and electronics. Both our economies are evolving as they must do for our goods and services to continue to attract a high-value premium.

In the food sector, New Zealand is no longer simply a commodity producer. We are positioning ourselves as a supplier of high-quality, value-added functional foods that are promoted for their health benefits. New Zealand has strengths also in tourism and niche manufacturing. The inaugural Japan-New Zealand Partnership Forum held in Tokyo in May last year was an important new business-led initiative to ensure that the trade and economic relationship keeps pace with changes in the world's most dynamic region in which we live.

Our strong trade relationship is underpinned by close and vibrant people-to-people links. There are 48 sister-city links, matched by the same number of friendship societies throughout Japan, which contribute to healthy interchange covering educational, cultural and sporting events. New Zealand also highly values the opportunity provided for our young people to experience Japan under the JET program, the Working Holiday Scheme and the Youth Goodwill Cruise program. Last year a new generation of young New Zealanders visited Japan for the first time under the Future Business Counterparts Invitation Program, a new initiative of the government of Japan that we greatly welcome.

In today's global financial crisis, New Zealand is not exempt from the international economic downturn and faces the prospect of more difficult economic times ahead. The government is committed to meet these challenges through strong fiscal and monetary action at home, and by working collaboratively with like-minded partners abroad to restore business confidence and build renewed momentum for economic growth.

In the midst of the current economic uncertainty, the strength of the relationship between New Zealand and Japan, our shared interests as partners in the Asia-Pacific region, our commitment to the multilateral system, and our shared belief in the creativity and resourcefulness of our people provide good grounds for optimism that there are opportunities also as well as challenges to take the relationship to an even higher level.

Cultural appetizer: A Maori group performs at the New Zealand Pavilion at Foodex Japan 2008.

Safe, high-quality, natural produce

New Zealand Trade & Enterprise is the New Zealand government's economic development agency supporting New Zealand companies exporting to Japan, and promoting New Zealand as an attractive destination for foreign direct investment.

New Zealand's clean environment is the perfect place for growing high-quality food and beverage products, and approximately 45 percent of New Zealand's exports to Japan are agricultural, including kiwifruit, lamb, beef, "kabocha" squash, dairy products, vegetable juices, fish and green shell mussels.

Due to its location in the Southern Hemisphere, New Zealand's seasons are the opposite of Japan's, which gives us the perfect complementary relationship with Japanese producers: Japan needs to import almost 60 percent of its food supply and New Zealand exports approximately 60 percent of its food production. Japan places great importance on the security of supply of high-quality, safe imported food products, so it is incumbent on New Zealand exporters to meet the highest safety standards.

Other main exports to Japan from New Zealand are aluminum, forestry products and crude oil.

New Zealand Trade & Enterprise will showcase 18 of New Zealand's best food and beverage companies at industry exhibition Foodex Japan 2009, held from March 3 to 6 at Makuhari Messe in Chiba.

World's first 'green' tourism scheme a hit in Japan

New Zealand's world-leading green tourism verification scheme, Qualmark Green, has been recognized, and is being actively promoted by Japan and Asia's largest travel agency, JTB.

A launch held Oct. 16 at the New Zealand Embassy in Tokyo was attended by JTB President and CEO Hiromi Tagawa, together with New Zealand Inc. representatives, including Tourism New Zealand General Manager Operations Tim Hunter, Air New Zealand Deputy CEO Norm Thompson and Ambassador Ian Kennedy. The event represented the beginning of a unique partnership between Tourism New Zealand, Air New Zealand and JTB in Japan.

"The Qualmark Green-accredited luxury tour to New Zealand is the first of its kind in the world, providing a range of environmentally sustainable New Zealand travel products in one package," said Tagawa.

"New Zealand is the only country in the world with such a robust quality-assessment program incorporating strict environmental sustainability practices, fully supported by its national airline."

"Qualmark Green, combined with Air New Zealand's world-leading research and development of biofuel, carbon-offset program and environment trust, and other industry initiatives, means New Zealand is truly taking a sustainable tourism leadership stance on the world stage," said Tourism New Zealand Chief Executive George Hickton.

Owned by Tourism New Zealand and the New Zealand Automobile Association, Qualmark is New Zealand's official mark of quality for tourism. It is a quality-assurance accreditation system, including star grading of accommodations, and an endorsement system for visitor transport, service and activities. Visit www.qualmark.co.nz and www.responsibletourism.co.nz for more information.

Working together: (Left to right) Air New Zealand Deputy CEO Norm Thompson, JTB President and CEO Hiromi Tagawa, New Zealand Ambassador Ian Kennedy and Tourism New Zealand General Manager Operations Tim Hunter are pictured during a promotional event Oct. 16 at the New Zealand Embassy in Tokyo.

Qualmark CEO Geoff Penrose said the development of the JTB tour, including top performers in the field, was positive evidence of the level of trade interest in what the industry is delivering.

JTB's "Royal Road" tour package, using an eco-luxury theme, almost exclusively features Qualmark and Qualmark Green-accredited tourism operators in New Zealand, including Millbrook Resort Queenstown, Huka Lodge in Taupo, The Langham Hotel in Auckland, Johnstons Coachlines and Real Journeys in Milford Sound.

Food production partnership progresses

When the New Zealand and Japanese prime ministers met in Tokyo in May 2008, they recognized that "New Zealand is an important supplier of food" and that "Japan is a net importer." Behind this statement lies a long-standing partnership between the two countries in food.

Strong business relationships exist between Japanese and New Zealand farmers and food companies, supplying New Zealand food products to Japanese consumers and strengthening Japan's agricultural base. Underpinning this cooperation is a shared commitment to food-safety systems of the highest quality.

Successful joint ventures and investment are on the increase. Cooperation between kiwifruit farmers in New Zealand and Japan has developed rapidly, based on different growing seasons in each country.

Since 2001, New Zealand kiwifruit producer Zespri has licensed Japanese kiwifruit growers in Shikoku and Kyushu to grow Zespri Gold kiwifruit to supply the Japanese market in New Zealand's off-season.

Bearing fruit: A Japanese farmworker inspects kiwifruit.

New Zealand has extensive expertise in pastoral farming. Each year, farmers from Hokkaido visit New Zealand to learn about pasture management. Their efforts to introduce grazing on Hokkaido help to reduce Japan's dependence on expensive imported feed. There are also productive links in flower growing and berry fruits. Access to the sales network of New Zealand's flower industry has helped Japanese growers to develop new international markets. In berry fruits, there is increasing cooperation between growers, companies and end-users in Japan's health and food industry.

Shaun Conroy, who heads New Zealand's Economic Development Office in Tokyo, believes that there are many opportunities for new forms of cooperation between Japan and New Zealand. "Japan's strong links to New Zealand's food industries are a useful hedge against future instability in world food markets, such as we saw in 2008," he said.

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