



# Correspondence



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## CLAIR Forum 2012

*“Improving Local Government Efficiency and Performance: Recent experiences in Australia and Japan”*



The 2012 CLAIR Forum was held on 17th August at the UTS Centre for Local Government in Sydney. This year's forum was a collaboration of CLAIR (Council of Local Authorities for International Relations), ACELG (Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government) and OSIPP (Osaka School of International Public Policy). This year's theme was “Improving local government efficiency and performance: recent experiences in Australia and Japan”, and was conducted over two sessions.

Around 70 people participated in the afternoon session facilitated by Professor Graham Sansom, Director of UTS Centre for Local Government; while around 40 people participated in the researcher's session beforehand. The researcher's session was facilitated by Professor Nobuo Akai, from OSIPP, and Ms Sarah Artist, Assistant Director of UTS Centre for Local Government. The forum began with welcome speeches from Professor Graham Sansom and Mr Yasuhiko Tanabe, Director of CLAIR Sydney, followed by opening speeches from Dr Masahiro Kohara, Consul General of Japan in Sydney, and Professor Attila Brungs, Deputy Vice Chancellor of UTS.



After the opening speeches, Mr Yasuhiko Tanabe gave a brief presentation comparing the structure of Japanese local governments to their counterparts in Australia. His presentation served as a supplement to Professor Akai's key note speech.

The topic for the first keynote address was “Explaining *Jigyō Shiwake*: the Japanese Approach to Local Government Policy and Program Review”, delivered by Professor Akai from OSIPP. His address was based on his experience as a member of the *Jigyō Shiwake* evaluation committee. He emphasized that with the use of *Jigyō Shiwake*, not only will local government employees or officers become more conscious about the impact of their role and responsibilities, but residents will also become more aware of issues in relation to efficiency.



The topic for the second keynote address was “The NSW Promoting Better Practice Program”, delivered by Ms Corin Moffatt, Manager of Innovation and Development, NSW Division of Local Government. Ms Moffatt also has international experience, having spent over 10 years working in the UK and learning about ways to promote better practice. Her address showed us methods of improving and strengthening local government policy.





# Japan Local Government Centre (CLAIR Sydney)



Two case studies followed the key note speeches.

Ms Kylie Cantwell, Organisational Development manager for Hobart City Council, discussed “The Improvement Journey at Hobart City Council”. This case study focused on Hobart’s business excellence, strategy, and planning.

The second case study, “Performance Reporting by Local Government”, was provided by Mr Steven Vlahos, Director of Local

Government Performance Auditing in the Victorian Auditor General’s Office, who spoke about his findings and recommendations from his 2012 report.



After the case studies, Professor Akai, Ms Moffatt, Ms Cantwell, and Mr Vlahos joined Professor Sansom in a panel discussion and shared their expertise. In the beginning of this panel discussion, Ms Artist summarized the researcher’s session which was held in the morning. Her summary helped deepen the audience’s understanding of the theme in preparation for the panel discussion.

We had five very interesting presentations in the researcher’s session:

1. Mr Dale Quinlivan, Executive Officer, City of Perth, “A Local Government Assurance Model: A PhD Study focusing on efficiency, effectiveness and sustainable and sustainability objectives”
2. Dr Haruaki Hirota, Associate Professor, Nagoya University for Commerce and Business, “Local Government Expenditure and Council Size: Quasi-Experimental Evidence from Japan made his speech about Local Government Expenditure and Council Size”
3. Mr Bligh Grant, Deputy Director of UNE Centre for Local Government, “Strategic Alliances of Councils: Two case studies of Strategic Alliances arising from the threat of compulsory amalgamation in NSW, Australia”
4. Dr Hideo Yunoue, Associate Professor, Chiba University of Commerce, “Spatial Patterns of Flypaper Effects for Local Expenditures by Policy Objective in Japan: A Bayesian Approach”
5. Mr Mick Grey, Project Manager, SmartGov, “Australian Local Government service delivery reviews undertaken in 11 councils across Australia”

After Ms Artist’s summary, the panel discussion gave the audience an opportunity to raise many questions and it was very informative for all.



The forum ended with some closing remarks from Professor Sansom, bringing the successful event to an end. Professor Sansom noted that although local communities differ in terms of their specific challenges and the context of those challengers, many are facing budgetary pressure and funding cuts, as seen in the cases from Australia and Japan. To deal with budgetary pressure and funding cuts, local governments must look at their services and ways to make them much more efficient. Professor Sansom emphasized two

critical points to reduce the gap between governments and citizens - working with local citizens, and being accountable to local citizens. He also said that it is important for local governments to effectively communicate and cooperate with each other.





# Japan Local Government Centre (CLAIR Sydney)

Though improving local government efficiency may be a challenging process that requires patience plus a lot of time and effort, we have to take the opportunity to further improve. This year's forum allowed us to learn from one another, and work towards the common goal of improving local government efficiency and performance. We would like to thank all of our speakers and participants for making this year's forum a great success.

For more information on the presentations featured in the CLAIR Forum 2012, please visit our website: <http://www.jlgc.org.au/default.htm>



## *JET Programme Farewell Receptions*



Each year, young Australians embark on an exciting journey through the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET Programme).

This year CLAIR was able to farewell some of the JET Programme Participants at the official farewell receptions, organized by the consulates. In Sydney (July 18<sup>th</sup>), Brisbane (July 25<sup>th</sup>), and Melbourne (July 27<sup>th</sup>), the Director of CLAIR joined the respective Consul Generals in offering their best wishes to the guys and gals headed to the land of the rising sun.

We were joined by other Japan related organizations and members of the Japanese press. The receptions were a good opportunity for the new JETs to ask last minute questions about life in Japan to finalize their preparations and begin the next chapter of their lives.

We hope that they gain a lot of wonderful experiences through this opportunity and serve as cultural ambassadors to further strengthen ties between Australia and Japan.

## *21st Kawasaki Junior Cultural Prize Presentation*

Four school children, the Kawasaki Youth Friendship Ambassadors, visited Wollongong in August. The Kawasaki Junior Cultural Prize is an art and essay competition conducted annually for Kawasaki school children aged 10-12 years. This is the 21<sup>st</sup> year of the competition, and the four students were chosen as the winners of the competition which is coordinated by the Kawasaki City Council and sponsored by the Kawasaki Shinkin Bank.

Next year, the Wollongong city council will celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its sister city relationship with Kawasaki city.





## From the Director Summer festivals and Japanese local governments



*This year's Aomori prefectural government Nebuta float*

In summer (around August, since the seasons in Japan are the opposite of Australia's), there are a lot of summer festivals and fireworks all around Japan. Most of them are originally based on religious ceremonies to welcome the return of one's ancestors' souls and to send them back to the spiritual world.

Usually summer festivals are community based, but some are famous national events which attract many people. One of the major summer festivals is the Aomori Nebuta Festival.

This festival is held annually from August 2–7 and features colourful lantern floats called Nebuta which are pulled through the streets of Central Aomori. This event attracts around 2 million visitors. During this festival, about 20 large Nebuta floats are paraded through the streets. These floats are constructed of wooden bases and metal frames. Japanese papers, called washi, are glued over the frames. These amazing floats, with more than 5 metres height, are finished off with historical figures or kabuki scenes being painted onto the paper and are stunningly illuminated from inside. These floats can take up to a year to complete.

There is a dance portion of this festival. The dancers are known as 'haneto' and they wear special costumes for this dance. Everyone is welcome to join in. I had worked for Aomori prefectural government as the director general for three years before I came to Australia. At that time, I had also been assigned as the leader of the Aomori prefectural government Nebuta team. Aomori prefectural government, as one of the big enterprises in this area, participates in the Nebuta festival with a giant Nebuta float which is paraded with the staff of Aomori prefectural government. In the same way, Aomori city participates in this event. (In Japan, there are many cases



*The staff of CLAIR Tokyo joined Haneto dancers, Misa Hirasawa (far left) will work for CLAIR SYDNEY next year*

where the capital city of a prefecture is the same name of the prefecture. For example, Kyoto city is the capital of Kyoto prefecture.) The governor of Aomori prefecture and the mayor of Aomori city also participate in the Nebuta festival and promote their local brand for millions of visitors.

Major summer festivals in Japan are closely connected with the tourist industry and offer the best opportunities for local governments to promote their tourist spots, local food, local products and above all their historical cultures. When you visit Japan in summer (again, it means winter here), be sure not to miss out.

For further information:

[http://www.atca.info/nebuta\\_en/](http://www.atca.info/nebuta_en/)



*The Aomori prefectural government Nebuta team with the governor Shingo Mimura (Blue) and me (White)*