

Speech by Consul General Matsui on the Occasion of the Matariki Champion Awards 2025

June 20, 2025

【Organizers】

Anne Marie Kendall QSM (NZ Māori Council) and Natasha Kendall, founder of Whaitiaki Charitable Trust

【Attendees】

Martin Mariassouce (Te Puni Kōkiri, Ministry of Māori Development) and distinguished local guests

1. Introduction

Tēnā koutou katoa. Ngā mihi o Matariki! It's my special honour and pleasure to be here in Papakura Marae today, with my wife Yuka and colleague Rika to join the celebration of this Maori New Year and attend the Matariki Champion Awards 2025. Please accept our warmest thanks to you Ms Anne Marie Kendall QSM and Ms Natasha Kendall for the kind invitation.

I would like to take this opportunity to talk about Matariki for Japan, Subaru to humbly contribute to the Maori-Japanese cultural exchange and mutual understanding. While Matariki has nine stars, Subaru with six stars holds a special significance for Japanese people. You also might have seen the six stars on the iconic emblem for the Japanese automobile brand which is called "Subaru." It was chosen in 1953 when five companies—formerly divisions of Nakajima Aircraft Company—merged to form Fuji Heavy Industries. The name "Subaru" was selected to honor the ideal of unification, inspired by both the star cluster's symbolism and the company's own origin: many parts becoming one whole. My private car is actually made by Subaru, which probably feeling right at home in Aotearoa.

2. Significance of Subaru in Japanese mythology and folklore

"Subaru" is the traditional Japanese name for the Pleiades star cluster, Matariki. Its celestial formation has been revered by the Japanese people since the ancient time. The word "Subaru" is derived from the classical Japanese verb "subaru," meaning "to unite" or "to come together as one." This etymology reflects the cluster's symbolic association with unity, as well as its profound connection to the agricultural calendar and seasonal transitions in Japan.

Within Japanese mythology and folklore, Subaru holds sacred meaning. The Japanese deity Susanoo-no-Mikoto, brother of the sun goddess Amaterasu who is believed to be the family origin of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, is often linked with storms and celestial disturbances, just like Tāwhirimātea (Māori god of wind). Some traditions suggest that the seasonal role of Subaru, guiding the agricultural rhythms of ancient communities, may bear associations with the worship of Susanoo.

The cultural significance of Subaru also finds poetic expression in Japan's oldest anthology of verse, the Manyōshū. Here, Subaru appears in elegiac reflections—poems gazing at the stars in remembrance of distant lovers or faraway homelands. These verses beautifully reveal the emotional

and spiritual resonance the stars have long held in the Japanese wairua(soul).

The first appearance of Subaru in the eastern sky signals the onset of early winter—around November—marking a time for fields to rest. For generations, farmers in rural Japan looked to the stars to determine the timing of their labors. Even today, oral traditions in many farming villages preserve sayings such as: "When Subaru rises, winter has come. When Subaru sets, spring begins."

Regional folk traditions across Japan reflect diverse interpretations of this celestial cluster. In Okinawa, it is known as Muribushi, believed to be the gathering place of star deities. In Ainu cosmology, it is called Turanne No Chiu (トランネ・ノチウ) and portrayed as six indolent sisters, each with her own tale. In essence, Subaru—like Aotearoa's Matariki—stands as a constellation of not only stars but also meaning: a guiding light in the sky, a marker of time, and a vessel of cultural identity.

3. Dedication of Japanese song "Subaru"

Finally, I would like to introduce a renowned Japanese waiata called "Subaru" which was released in 1980 by Mr Shinji Tanimura. Let us sing the first verse and invite you to join at the ending.

目を閉じて 何も見えず 哀しくて目を開ければ
荒野に向かう道より 他に見えるものはなし
ああ 砕け散る宿命の星たちよ
せめて密やかに この身を照せよ
我は行く 蒼白き頬のままで
我は行く さらば昴よ

Ka katia ōku karu, ka taea te kite te kore

Ka huaki i te pōuri i runga o te ara ki te koraha - kāore tonu he mārama

Āue, e ngā whetū, kua pakaru, kua marara

Tiaho puku mai ki tēnei tinana

Ka haere au, he mā ōku pāpāringa

Ka haere tonu - poroporoaki rā, e Subaru

The "stars" in the lyrics transcend literal celestial bodies; they serve as potent metaphors for home, loved ones, and cherished memories lost to time. The song masterfully interweaves feelings of longing, affection, and a poignant sense of hope, creating a complex emotional tapestry. Despite its simplicity, the song's structure perfectly complements Tanimura's distinctive melodic style and the lyrical poignancy, resulting in a timeless classic that resonates deeply with you. Its enduring appeal, even after more than four decades, speaks to the universality of its themes and the unfailing power of its melody.

4. Conclusion

Thank you again, Whaea Anne, and the entire Whaitiaki team, for your unwavering commitment to making Papakura and Tāmaki Makaurau a better place. It's an honour to be here. Mānawatia a Matariki!