



Japanese Ambassador to Finland Mr Takashi Okada's company visits in North Karelia, Finland

On August 30, 2024, His Excellency **Mr. Takashi Okada**, the Japanese Ambassador to Finland accompanied by two Embassy diplomats visited three North Karelian companies which are forerunners in their fields of expertise. The delegation was in the region for the BIOSYS Hokkaido Sakura seedling transplanting ceremony scheduled for August 31, the North Karelia Region Day.

Nordic Koivu Ltd., Municipality of Tohmajärvi



From left Mr. Astushi Miura, First Secretary, and Mr. Takashi Okada, the Ambassador of Japan to Finland, at the Nordic Koivu Factory. Photo: Naomi Moriyama

Tohmajärvi, a medium-sized North Karelian municipality with about 4,000 inhabitants, is a good place to enter the world market and reach Japan. This has been proven by **Nordic Koivu Ltd.**, located in the municipality. The company is the world's leading producer of birch water (birch sap), whose main market areas are Central Europe and Asia, including Japan. The company produces the purest birch water in the world on an industrial scale for both consumers and industry (food, drinks, cosmetics, pharma).

"The company has been exporting to Japan for years and the goal is to increase it," said Mr. **Arto Korhonen**, Co-founder and CEO of Nordic Koivu Ltd.

Mr. Korhonen and Ms. Tiina Honkanen, Quality Manager gave the Embassy Delegation a tour of the factory and gave a presentation on how the sap is collected as well as the business overview. We then tasted both straight birch sap and condensed one.

Mikko Löppönen, Mayor of Tohmajärvi, mentioned that the municipality has had business and education cooperation in Japan in the 1990s and 2000s. Contacts are still maintained today. This shows that even a long distance is not an obstacle to cooperation between both companies and public sector actors if there is mutual interest.

Savon Voima Ltd., Joensuu Power Plant



From left Mr. **Veli-Matti Kuronen**, Operations Manager, Mr. Antti Nuutinen, Operations Foreman, Mr. Takashi Okada, the Ambassador of Japan to Finland and Mr. Atsushi Miura, the Embassy of Japan in Finland. Photo: Naomi Moriyama

Biosys Japan project's target regions in Japan, Nagano Prefecture and Hokkaido Prefecture, as well as many other areas of Japan, aim to significantly promote the use of renewable energy by 2050. This may have been one of the reasons why Ambassador Okada wanted to visit **Savon Voima's** Joensuu power plant. The power plant produces district heating and electricity from local energy sources, such as wood chips and peat on a small scale, which will be completely phased out by 2026.

"The goal is to have carbon-neutral electricity production by 2027 and energy production by 2030," said Operations Manager Mr. **Veli-Matti Kuronen**. Savon Voima has an extensive investment programme underway, including the construction of heat pumps (approximately 6 MW) and district heating storage in Joensuu. The guests learned that Joensuu Biocoal Ltd. plant, the largest industrial-scale bio-coal production plant in Europe, owned by the investment company Taaleri, is also under construction in the power plant area, and the waste heat released from the process will be utilised in Savon Voima's Joensuu district heating network. In addition, a green hydrogen production plant and a solar power plant are planned to be built in the area. Savon Voima's Joensuu power plant can serve as an example to our Japanese partners of how a power plant that previously operated mainly on oil and peat has already developed into an almost carbon-neutral modern power plant, around which many other kinds of green transition production are being built. And, of course, we hope that there will be a market for North Karelia's forest and energy sector know-how and technologies in Japan, as the country increases the utilisation of its forests and the production of renewable energy.

Arbonaut Ltd.



From Left **Mr. Mikko Saarimaa**, Head of Forest Operation Management, **Mr. Takashi Okada**, the Ambassador of Japan to Finland, **Dr. Tuomo Kauranne**, Chairman and President, **Mr. Jari Kinnunen**, Chief Sales Officer and **Mr. Yoshito Shimizu**, Business Developer. Photo: Naomi Moriyama

Third place to visit, **Arbonaut Ltd**, is a great example of how North Karelia's forest expertise is in demand around the world. The company, which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, has exported its expertise in forest ecosystem inventories, forest operations management, ecological risk assessment and forest information systems around the world, including Australia and South America.

Dr. Tuomo Kauranne, Chairman and President, **Mr. Jari Kinnunen**, Chief Sales Officer, **Mr. Yoshito Shimizu**, Business Developer, **Mr. Mikko Saarimaa**, Head of Forest Operation Management presented the guests the corporate overview with an emphasis on its recent Japanese operation.

The company is currently developing a localised information system with Precision Forest Measurement Ltd in Nagano. Among other things, the project digitalises the forest planning process and creates maps that support decision-making. In the discussion, it was noted that Japan is generally a technologically advanced country but is a little behind in the digitalisation of forestry. We also learned that Japan's forested area is 25 million hectares, which is slightly larger

than Finland's. Mountainous areas with steep slopes and soft soil create challenges for the utilisation of forests. Arbonaut Ltd has long-standing relations with Japan. Dr. **Kauranne** said that he visited Japan for the first time at the turn of the millennium and will next go there in the autumn. Arbonaut was actively involved in the first phase of the North Karelia-Japan project in 2020–2023. The company believes that the deepening cooperation between actors in North Karelia and the networks created in the project have helped the company find new contacts and customers. By working together, we are also more convincing and can offer functional solutions to the needs of our Japanese friends to develop sustainable forestry.

During the Ambassador's visit, Ms. Naomi Moriyama, Communications Specialist from the Regional Council of North Karelia presented the BIOSYS North Karelia International Growth Ecosystem and was delighted to host the Ambassador's visit and engage the delegation with concrete business stories. The BIOSYS Ecosystem supports the region's economic growth in green and clean transition, having the mission to build and deepen the long-lasting relationship and region-to-region collaboration, RDI and business activities between North Karelia and Prefectures of Nagano and Hokkaido partners in forest bioeconomy and food solutions. BIOSYS together with partners supports the growth of know-how and information exchange and joint development between regions and the growth of mutual and two-way international trade between companies. Overall, the visit of the Japanese Ambassador was very successful. We hope that the good cooperation with the Embassy of Japan will continue, fostering prosperity for North Karelia and the Japanese cooperation regions.

Does your business want to join the BIOSYS North Karelia International Growth Ecosystem? Please contact Timo Leinonen at timo.leinonen@pohjois-karjala.fi

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