

## News from under the Southern Cross - Edition 36

### The Phantasmal Queensland Business Trip

30 September

Since arriving to take up my post late last year, I had been working like a demon making my way around Australia. Yet my business trips since July have been cancelled one after another as a result of COVID-19. Even my scheduled business trip to Brisbane, the state capital of Queensland, which was meant to take place in the middle of this month was cancelled. Aargh!

#### 1. A special year in a special state

This year is a special year in Japan-Australia relations. It marks the 125th anniversary of Japan establishing its first diplomatic representation (embassy, consulate-general) in Australia. This took place in 1896. The Meiji government opened the first Japanese consulate in Australia in Townsville in the state (or then colony) of QLD.



A group from the Brisbane Consulate-General visiting the former Japanese Consulate in Townsville, circa 1970  
(Source: City Libraries Townsville Local History Collection)

A major part of the relationship between Japan and Australia at the time lay in fishing and in particular pearl shell collection. It was the world of “木曜島の夜会 (Mokuyo-to no yakai, meaning “A Night Party on Thursday Island”), the famous literary work by SHIBA Ryotaro. This may have been the background as to why Townsville was selected rather than Sydney or Melbourne.

## **2. A special relationship**

The relationship between QLD and Japan remains special today. Japan has of course been a major benefactor of exports in beef and coal from QLD.

The Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast, Cairns, the Great Barrier Reef etc., etc. Many of the spots that Japanese people like to visit in Australia are in QLD. The following figure predates the COVID-19 pandemic, however the annual number of tourist visitors from Japan to QLD is a good 210,000. This is around half of all Japanese tourists to Australia.

As a result of these close economic and tourism ties, Japanese language education in QLD is popular. Australia is No.1 in the world for the proportion of its population studying Japanese and QLD is leading the pack. Some 130,000 people are studying Japanese in QLD, which is over 30% of all Japanese language learners in Australia.



The Scenic Gold Coast



If you're going surfing, then the Sunshine Coast is a must



There are many places where you can meet koalas

### **3. The man who cannot fly**

In addition to this, Brisbane has been selected to host the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. We will share the experience of Tokyo so that the Brisbane Games can be a success. This has opened up a new frontier in co-operation between Japan and Australia.

That's why I was very much looking forward to this business trip. Due to COVID-19, the ACT, where Canberra is situated, is in the midst of a lockdown that will stretch to just over 2 months. And due to non-reciprocal border arrangements with QLD, I wasn't able to visit Brisbane.

### **4. The man who won't give up**

But I would be ashamed of myself as a Japanese man if I give up that easily. It would be inexcusable to those who came before us, who suffered while diving to the dark depths of the sea floor, tumbled by the strong currents, in order to collect pearl shells. So I decided to deliver two speeches online that I had originally been scheduled to give in Brisbane.

The first of these took place with the QLD Branch of the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA), one of Australia's representative think-tanks, on the theme of the situation in the Indo-Pacific region and Japan-Australia co-operation in response to this. The other was hosted by Griffith University, where I shed light on the Japan-Australia relationship. I felt the strong degree of trust and high-level of interest in Japan from the vibrant questions that followed my speeches, and I was glad that I delivered them ([The AIIA speech text](#), [the Griffith University speech text](#), and [video of my appearance](#)).



A scene from my presentation at Griffith University  
(Clockwise from top right – Professor Caitlin Byrne of Griffith University;  
Chris Saines, the Director of the Queensland Art Gallery; the Author)

## 5. The Deep North

I wonder if there's anybody who has heard the phrase "the Deep North". It's a phrase that the people of Sydney and Melbourne in the southern states use to refer to QLD, specifically the northern part of QLD. You could say it's the reverse form of the "Deep South" that Americans often use to refer to southern states in the United States.

It reminds me of a conversation that I had in the office of a Supreme Court Justice of one of Australia's states. When I asked if there are any novels on the theme of Australia's judicial system that I should read, the judge quietly stood up and pulled a copy of *The Tall Man* from the bookshelf and gave it to me as a gift. The novel takes as its theme an incident that took place on Palm Island in the "Deep North" of QLD, and was so interesting that I finished reading it in one sitting.



The distance by land from Canberra, where the Embassy is, to Townsville is approximately 2,200km (about the same distance as Sapporo to Okinawa)  
(Source: OpenStreetMap contributors)

So I really want to get up to the Deep North in my next trip to QLD. Really everything in Australia is a source of endless fascination to me.

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