

Speech

Presented by His Excellency Mr Yamagami Shingo

Ambassador of Japan to Australia

**On the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the establishment of
Japan's first Australian diplomatic mission in Townsville**

11 October 2021

1. Japanese Migration and the Establishment of the Consulate

Mayor Hill,

Distinguished guests,

Friends of Japan,

Today we celebrate the one-hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the first Japanese consulate in Australia, established in Townsville, March 7 1896.

The establishment was significant not only to Australia-Japan relations, but also to Townsville, as Japan was the first nation to appoint a career diplomat to this city.

This milestone came about in part because of the history of Japanese migration to Queensland.

Indeed, Australia's first ever recorded Japanese resident, the acrobat Sakuragawa Rikinosuke, settled here in this State.

His circus troupe performed in various North Queensland towns, including just an hour up the road in Ingham 132 years ago.

Three years later, fifty Japanese workers also arrived in the Herbert River region where they contributed to the growing sugar industry.

They were the first of thousands to come to Queensland over the following years.

At this point, Japanese workers had already been employed in North Queensland's pearl industry for several decades.

In both industries Japanese workers proved to be reliable, intelligent and skilful.

It was under these circumstances that the Japanese government chose Townsville, the heartland of Japanese migration, for its first official mission in Australia.

The Consulate was headed by Nakagawa Tsunejiro.

He was tasked with supporting Japanese workers as well as fostering trade opportunities.

His success is illustrated by the commencement of the first regular shipping route between Australia and Japan in the following year, subsidized by the Japanese government.

Nakagawa leased the home of explorer and pioneer John Graham McDonald, known as *Kardinia*.

Built in 1888, and heritage listed in 1992, *Kardinia* still stands on Victoria Street, Stanton Hill.

It has been meticulously restored and maintained by June and Paul Tonnoir, who have shared it with the community by holding numerous events.

June and Paul have maintained the link between *Kardinia* and Japan by decorating it with Japanese paintings and silks.

While Nakagawa was the first Japanese Consul in Australia, Japan had long been eager to strengthen trade links, as evidenced by the appointments of numerous honorary consuls.

The first of these was the 1879 appointment of Alexander Marks, an Australian merchant who had previously lived in Yokohama.

Interestingly, Marks also identified the potential of Japanese labor in North Queensland.

In 1884, he travelled from his Melbourne headquarters to Brisbane to discuss the prospect of Japanese emigration with the Queensland Premier.

According to historian David Sissons, around a decade later Marks also made a failed attempt to immigrate himself to Thursday Island.

Clearly North Queensland was the place to be for anyone interested in fostering ties with Japan.

I too made a failed attempt to get to Thursday Island earlier this year.

Unlike Marks, it was COVID restrictions which stopped me.

Pandemic conditions permitting, I hope to be able to visit both Thursday Island and Townsville soon.

If not soon, then at least around the time the Toyota Cowboys start their next season.

While the Townsville Consulate no longer exists, our two missions in Brisbane and Cairns carry on its pioneering spirit through their dedication to fostering unprecedented trade, defense and cultural relations.

And the people-to-people ties that define the Townsville-Japan relationship continue to thrive.

Today, I would like to share a few of those people's stories as I outline how Japan's ties with this region have strengthened its overall relationship with Australia in the areas of business, defense and cultural exchange.

2. Business Ties

First, our business ties.

The economic importance of North Queensland recognized by Japanese laborers, the Japanese Consul and Alexander Marks remains today.

Just as before, the region boasts a diverse natural environment of rich soils, abundant water and resources.

As the largest city in this region, Townsville is a gateway for Japan's access to its minerals and agricultural products.

Sugar, the industry so many Japanese laborers contributed to, continues to be an important commodity for our ties.

Today, Aussie sugar has captured more than four fifths of Japan's imported sugar market.

And a considerable amount comes from here.

Sugar and molasses make up just under half of all exports from the Port of Townsville.

And around ten per cent of all exports from the port go to Japan.

While the pearling industry has not remained as vibrant, there are some who carry on its legacy.

These days, Mr Takami Kazuyoshi of Friday Island is the sole custodian of the pearling tradition in the Torres Strait.

For over forty years, he has been educating visitors about this unique trade.

Fortunately, since the days of pearl farming our business ties have broadened over a wide range of industries.

Today, Japan is Queensland's second largest merchandise trading partner.

Exports from this State to Japan totaled a whopping seven-thousand, nine-hundred million dollars last year.

And the benefits go both ways.

To Japan, Queensland is a safe and reliable supplier of energy, resources and agricultural products such as beef.

To Queensland, Japan provides a trustworthy source of road vehicles, refined petroleum products and industrial machinery.

Japanese investment has also increased exponentially.

Today, Japan is Australia's second largest investor.

In Queensland, there are around two-hundred and twenty-nine Japanese companies contributing to the local economy and creating jobs.

Just hours south of Townsville in the Bowen Basin, Mitsubishi Development, Mitsui, Itochu, Idemitsu, Sojitz, Marubeni, Sumitomo, JFE steel and others have been investing in the coal industry.

Meanwhile, Japanese companies clearly have their eye on Gladstone to become Australia's first renewable hydrogen hub.

Companies including Itochu, Sumitomo, Iwatani, Kansai Electric Power, Marubeni and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries are spearheading hydrogen and ammonia pilot projects in this region.

In other parts of the State, ENEOS and IHI are doing the same.

Much closer to home, Kawasaki Heavy Industries is assessing the potential of a green hydrogen production facility right here in Townsville.

I look forward to the day when I can travel back to Townsville to witness the fruition of this project with my own eyes.

3. Defense Ties

Next, I would like to turn to our defense ties.

Today, Townsville is known as a garrison city, home to Australia's largest Army base.

Its military history spans back before federation, as evidenced by the fortification at Kissing Point.

It was also around this time that its defense ties with Japan began to take root.

As early as 1900, Japan's imperial Navy battle ship, the *Hiei*, visited Townsville.

The grave of one of its fourth-class seaman, Kawai Tomojiro, who died of beriberi, still remains today.

Not long after, in 1903, the Imperial Japanese Naval Training Squadron docked in Townsville on its way back to Japan from visits to several Australian capital cities.

Townsville was the only non-capital on its itinerary, chosen because of the presence of the Japanese Consulate.

The welcome the officers and crew received included a tour of the Town Hall complex and a rendition of the Japanese national anthem by a group of school children.

This encouraged the return of the Japanese Navy in 1906.

And again in 1910, 1911 and 1917.

These visits attest to the cordial relations that existed between our two nations prior to the Second World War.

Such relations were also apparent in the 1914 Japanese Navy's escorting of the first Australian and New Zealand convoy in the Indian Ocean.

This history has led to the remarkable defense ties we see today, which having overcome the scars from World War Two are now defined by mutual trust and comradery.

These ties can be witnessed here in Townsville in multilateral exercises such as the Talisman-Sabre and Southern Jackaroo.

As a gateway to the region, the importance of our bilateral commitment to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific is perhaps more keenly felt here than other cities.

You may have heard that Japan and Australia are on the cusp of finalizing negotiations on a land-mark agreement, the Reciprocal Access Agreement.

This agreement will open the way for more exercises, more exchanges, more information sharing, and more capability development, including of course in Townsville.

4. Cultural Ties

Finally, I would like to speak about our cultural exchange ties.

Here too, there are numerous fascinating stories from the vault of Townsville-Japan history.

I was astounded to learn that a Japanese linguist, Tsunoda Tasaku, is the last surviving speaker of the Warrongo language, formerly spoken by the Warrongo people in the area around Townsville.

This important cultural asset was taught to him by Alf Palmer, the last native speaker, who sadly passed away in 1981.

During the 2000s, Tsunoda and his wife travelled to Townsville numerous times to conduct Warrongo lessons so that local children could learn the language.

Language is of course central to our bilateral ties because of its ability to promote deep cultural understanding.

I am proud to note that Australia has the largest number of people learning Japanese per capita in the world.

In Queensland alone, there are over one-hundred and thirty-thousand.

This equates to thirty-percent of Australia's total population of Japanese learners.

I do hope that this trend continues, despite the state of diminishing Asian Studies departments in universities across Australia.

Because, as Mr Palmer and Professor Tsunoda have shown, language is essential to truly understand another society, its culture and history.

Townsville and Japan also share some inspiring sister city relationships.

In 1990, it formed an agreement with Shunan City, Yamaguchi, inspired by the mineral trade between its port and Shunan's Kudamatsu Port.

I hear that thus far over three-hundred young people from Shunan City have visited Townsville through their popular student exchange program.

Townsville created a further agreement with Iwaki City, Fukushima, in 1991.

When Iwaki was devastated by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, civic leaders in Townsville offered their assistance, along with their best wishes and condolences via a local radio broadcast.

These community ties foster cooperation in good times and bad.

They are a testament to the strength of the overarching Japan-Australia relationship.

5. The Next 125 Years

To conclude, I would like to reiterate that Townsville's early ties with Japan were not simply pioneering.

The strong people-to-people linkages fostered here enabled our overarching bilateral relationship to grow in regards to business, defence and cultural exchange.

In the one-hundred and twenty-five years to come, I look forward to seeing how our ties will continue to reach unprecedented heights.

With increasing focus on the stability of the Indo-Pacific, and Townsville's position as Australia's primary defence hub, there is great scope for further cooperation in security and defence.

Increased defence cooperation could also provide flow on benefits and opportunities for local Townsville companies, strengthening our business ties.

Expanding markets for meat and agricultural products in Southeast Asia also signal there are opportunities for local producers to partner with Japanese companies to enter these new markets and meet demand.

For now, let us celebrate the legacy of this great City as the birthplace of Japan-Australia ties.

Thank you.