

**Speech by HE Ambassador YAMAGAMI Shingo on the occasion
of the Obon Ceremony
Thursday Island Cemetery
Thursday Island, Queensland – Mon 15 Aug 2022**

Torres Shire Council Mayor, Councillor Yen Loban,

Reverend James Wilson,

Esteemed members of the Thursday Island community,

It is lovely to be with you today on this beautiful island.

Whenever I visit northern Australia, I am reminded of the proximity of Australia to Asia.

Thursday Island's historic links with Japan demonstrate that Australia is indeed a part of the Asia region.

I would like to use this opportunity to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Torres Shire Council for all that they have done to ensure the success of this event today.

As well as their ongoing commitment to maintaining the cemetery.

Indeed Japan is grateful.

The Japanese government provide funds for the annual maintenance of the cemetery as well as for the installation of four hundred grave markers.

But it is the Torres Shire Council who have carried out these grave installation projects and maintenance, while also contributing financially to the preservation of this historic site.

To the community of Thursday Island, I thank you for welcoming me

to this important ceremony.

It is out of respect for your ancestors that we have gathered today.

Since 1878, Japanese people have worked and lived on this island.

In some cases it also became their final resting place, as represented by the seven hundred plus graves we see here in the Japanese section of this cemetery.

Japan is proud of the work of Japanese pearl divers on this island and their contribution to the local economy.

Japanese divers who lived and worked here are said to have dived an incredible fifty times per day.

This is around ten times the daily dive rate of their British counterparts.

Their sacrifice laid the foundations for the strong relationship Japan and Australia now share.

And we owe this to the commitment and dedication of these people.

Now I would be so delighted to say that the Japan-Australia relationship has never been better.

We can see huge developments in bilateral cooperation over the decades not only in the fields of economy and defence, but also in cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

I am convinced that Japan and Australia will keep this momentum and deepen our already strong ties even further.

I would also like to express my appreciation for Reverend James Wilson "Tetsuyuu", whom it was a great pleasure for me to meet in Cowra two weeks ago.

For years, Reverend Wilson has played a vital role in funeral

services, commemorative services and memorials all over Queensland.

With regards to this Obon ceremony, held each year here on Thursday Island, he has been present since the very first service in 2005.

And last year, his contributions led to a commendation from the Japanese Consul-General in Brisbane.

Holding these Obon ceremonies carries on the legacy of those who lived, worked and perished here.

This history must be remembered.

I hope that today's ceremony will remain in your hearts and minds for many years to come, as I know it will in mine.

Thank you.