

Mr Ben Morton, MP
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories

C/- Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Morton

Inquiry into the adequacy of Australia's infrastructure assets and capability in Antarctica

I wish to make a brief submission to the current inquiry.

My recommendations relate to all of the Terms of Reference, but I have indicated at the end of each recommendation which numbered points in the ToR are most relevant to that particular recommendation.

Summary

The Australian Government's *Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan* outlines a number of key initiatives to support and enhance Australia's Antarctic interests. The government has committed to the following key actions:

- A new world-class research and resupply Antarctic icebreaker.
- New and stable funding to support an active Australian Antarctic programme.
- Establish Australia's position of science leadership in Antarctica through:
 - developing modern and flexible infrastructure, including
 - restoring traverse capabilities and establishing mobile stations in the Antarctic interior
 - further scoping options for expanded aviation capabilities to establish a year-round aviation capability between Hobart and Antarctica
 - progressing options for more efficient and flexible use of existing research stations
 - a revitalised science programme, including
 - coordinated and effective funding of Antarctic science
 - opportunities for public-private partnerships to conduct new and iconic scientific research endeavours
 - greater collaboration and resource-sharing with other nations active in East Antarctica.
- Strengthen the Antarctic Treaty system and our influence in it, by building and maintaining strong and effective relationships with other Antarctic Treaty nations through our international engagement.
- Build Tasmania's status as the premier East Antarctic Gateway for science and operations, including through:
 - streamlined Government regulatory and approval processes to facilitate increased use of Hobart as an Antarctic Gateway port

- agreeing priority proposals with industry to enhance Tasmania's status as an Antarctic Gateway, including expanded infrastructure in Hobart for the new icebreaker
- a major review on building research infrastructure in Hobart to establish Australia as the world's leader in krill research.

Recommendation 1.

Current and future appropriation to and expenditure on the Australian Antarctic Program should match the ambitions and commitments outlined in the *Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan*. Funding should ensure that Australia's science program in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean is able to make full use of the new shipping, air, and science capabilities committed to in the *20 Year Action Plan*. (ToR 1, 2, and 3).

Recommendation 2.

That the Australian and Tasmanian governments, together with all interested parties, ensure that Hobart has the appropriate port and air infrastructure to attract new Antarctic efforts and support the expansion of the Australian program. (ToR 1, 2, 3, and 4).

Recommendation 3.

That existing, renewed, and new infrastructure in Antarctica and Australia is fully funded to support a modernised Antarctic program that can span all of the Australian Antarctic Territory and beyond. (ToR 1, 2, and 3).

Recommendation 4.

That the "hybrid system" of science delivery that involves Government agencies and the non-government research sector be maintained; and that priorities be set from time to time and regularly reviewed to ensure that the Antarctic science program is relevant to Government. (ToR 1 and 2).

Recommendation 5.

That appropriate diplomatic and other effort is provided across the whole of Government to support Australia's Antarctic interests in a world of changing geopolitical influences. (ToR 1).

Background

In 2014 I provided a report to the Australian Government on Australia's Antarctic program, the *20 Year Australian Antarctic Strategic Plan* (http://www.antarctica.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/178595/20-Year-Plan_Press-Report.pdf).

In 2016 the Australian Government responded with the *Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan*. The Government's strategy and action plan provides a number of important

and significant investments in Antarctic infrastructure, and a range of initiatives to modernise and strengthen Australian Antarctic efforts.

All of the recommendations I made in my Report in 2014 are relevant to this inquiry. The purpose of this submission is to highlight the ongoing need to ensure that Australia remains focussed on our southern frontier; and that the commitments contained in the Government's 2016 strategy and action plan are fully funded and committed to in future budgets.

Australia cannot rely on the status quo for future influence and regional security in the Antarctic. Our standing in Antarctic affairs, and our ability to influence the future of this region, so important to Australia, requires ongoing and growing commitments to strategic investment in built, logistical, scientific, policy and diplomatic infrastructure.

I would be pleased to provide oral evidence at any hearings if required.

Yours sincerely

[signed]

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