



Australian Government

**Australian Government response to the Joint Standing Committee on the
National Capital and External Territories inquiry into the Australian Antarctic
Territory report:**

Maintaining Australia's national interests in Antarctica May 2018

April 2019

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, appoint an Antarctic Ambassador to oversee diplomatic activities and to provide leadership in promoting Australia's interests in Antarctica internationally.

Government Response

Noted. The Australian Government is considering options with regards to this Recommendation.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consider ways in which it can further strengthen its search and rescue planning processes so that it can better respond to increased activity in the future.

Government Response

Agreed. The Australian Government is strongly committed to ensuring it remains aware of any potential and ongoing risks within the Antarctic region in order to provide prompt, measured and effective responses to incidents.

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) and the Department of the Environment and Energy's Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) work closely together to respond to search and rescue (SAR) incidents in the Antarctic region, also meeting on an annual and as-needed basis to analyse and assess upcoming demands within the area. This cooperation extends to working closely with our international and regional counterparts, and includes a number of domestic and international MoUs on SAR cooperation, workshops, and research projects to ensure preparedness for upcoming and changed activities.

Australia is an active participant of the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP) SAR Workshop, which brings together rescue coordination centre and Antarctic specialists every three years. Australia intends to ramp up this engagement during the next meeting in New Zealand in May 2019 in order to seek enhanced information sharing on Antarctic activities.

AMSA has also been working with their dedicated fixed SAR aircraft operator to ascertain whether it would be possible to operate the Challenger aircraft to Wilkins Aerodrome and Davis research station in the future. This aircraft could potentially operate as a SAR asset, or be able to transport people and urgent supplies.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Australian Antarctic Division conduct a formal site inspection in East Antarctica within the next year (2019–20 season). Once inland traverse capabilities have been restored, the Committee recommends that the Australian Antarctic Division set a target to conduct formal inspections annually, with an emphasis on inspections in East Antarctica. To meet these requirements, the Committee recommends that work to restore Australia's inland traverse capabilities be expedited and completed by the end of the 2019–20 season.

Government Response

Agreed in part. The Australian Government is committed to conducting regular inspections under the provisions of the Antarctic Treaty and its Environmental Protocol. The Department of the Environment and Energy's Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) leads within Government on the organisation and support of inspection activities. Australia last conducted inspections in the 2016-17 season, and inspection activity in 2019-20 is planned, subject to Australian Antarctic Program priorities, logistic capabilities, and consideration of cooperative activities with other nations.

In planning and conducting inspections the AAD considers all logistic options to support inspection teams. Inspection activities require relatively rapid access to inspection locations, and aviation support is efficient and effective in most cases. Ship logistics may also be appropriate in some instances. Because inspections require rapid access, and do not involve heavy equipment, traverse capabilities are unlikely to be utilised for inspection activities.

Overland traverse will enhance Australia's Antarctic science leadership, including by ensuring Australia's involvement in the search for million-year ice. The Australian Government committed to re-establishing Australia's traverse capability in the *Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan* by 2020-21. The Government is on track to meet this commitment.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Department of the Environment and Energy, consistent with its commitments in the Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan, prepare a detailed plan and a timeline for the upgrade and modernisation of Australia's Antarctic research stations.

Government Response

Agreed. Consistent with the *Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan* the Australian Government is currently developing a strategic asset management framework to govern the long-term maintenance and renewal of its Antarctic based research station network. This will include the development of a series of plans to facilitate a long-term commitment to overhaul, as needed, its station network to deliver infrastructure that is efficient, flexible and suited to our future needs.

This work will support the efficient investment of more than \$450 million to upgrade Australia's Antarctic research stations and supporting infrastructure, announced by the Australian Government on 24 February 2019.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Department of the Environment and Energy prioritise waste remediation once the new icebreaker is operational, given the increased capacity to carry material including waste.

Government Response

Agreed. The Australian Government is committed to meeting its obligations under the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty with regard to clean up of past waste disposal sites and abandoned work sites. With the increased capability provided by the new Icebreaker, the Department of the Environment and Energy will prioritise the remediation and removal of waste

material from all of Australia's Antarctic research stations and minimise the environmental impact associated with current and future operations of Australia's Antarctic Program.

In its report, the Committee also noted the *Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan* commitment to develop an Antarctic clean up strategy in years 10 -20 and suggested this be completed in a timely manner. The clean up strategy will be underpinned by scientific research into environmental risk assessment, appropriate remediation technologies and environmental guidelines development. It will also be supported by the enhanced capability of the new Icebreaker and any additional logistical capability required to support modernisation programs such as year round aviation access and inland traverse.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provide the Department of the Environment and Energy with an enhanced capacity to develop a business and strategic case for year-round aviation in Antarctic. The Committee further recommends that the investment decision be made by December 2019 at the latest.

Government Response

Agreed in part. Investigations into year-round aviation access commenced in 2016 and are ongoing as a key component of the *Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan*. The Government provided an initial \$10 million to scope options and undertake preliminary site investigations. On 18 May 2018, the Government announced its intention to construct a paved runway near Davis research station, subject to environmental approvals. The Government is currently developing a detailed business case and has committed to take an investment decision by 2020-21.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that CSIRO explore further opportunities to ensure that the RV Investigator is able to operate at its full capacity. Consideration should be given to whether incentives can be developed to encourage non-government marine research activities using the vessel.

Government Response

Agreed. In the May 2018 Federal Budget, the Australian Government announced additional funding of \$31 million over the forward estimates for the CSIRO Marine National Facility, which operates the *RV Investigator*, enabling the ship to achieve full utilisation, representing ~300 voyage-days per annum.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government examine options for the co-location of relevant institutions in the proposed Macquarie Point Antarctic Precinct, including the relocation of CSIRO, CCAMLR, the Tasmanian Polar Network, part of the Bureau of Meteorology, and components of the Australian Antarctic Division.

Government Response

Agreed. Through the Hobart City Deal announced on 24 February 2019, the Australian and Tasmanian Governments have agreed to facilitate an Antarctic and Science Precinct at Macquarie Point. To begin this process, the Australian and Tasmanian Governments will work together on a business case for the creation of the Precinct with the objective of attracting to Macquarie Point national and private Antarctic and Southern Ocean institutions.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consider how the strategic value of the Australian Antarctic Division to the Commonwealth is captured, and develop mechanisms to provide the Australian Antarctic Division with enhanced budget certainty and funding, in light of its work and capital requirements.

Government Response

Agreed in principle. The Australian Government, through the Department of the Environment and Energy, is reviewing the way AAD delivers its core business in the face of emerging capabilities and funding pressures. The review is considering how the strategic value of the AAD to the Commonwealth is captured and will develop mechanisms to support the efficient delivery of the Australian Antarctic Program, with a new operating and financial management model that meets the needs of the organisation now and into the future.

This will support the efficient investment of more than \$450 million to upgrade Australia's Antarctic research stations and supporting infrastructure, announced by the Australian Government on 24 February 2019.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the Department of the Environment and Energy work to complete its assessment of Australia's ageing Antarctic asset base, separate from Australia's Antarctic stations, as soon as practicable. Where appropriate, relevant business cases should be developed, particularly where a new spending proposal is required to be managed through the Australian Government's budget processes.

Government Response

Agreed. The Australian Government, through the Department of the Environment and Energy, has undertaken an assessment of Australia's Antarctic asset base and is now working with external consultants to develop an asset management framework.

To deliver the necessary improvements, the Australian Government will invest more than \$450 million over the next ten years to upgrade our Antarctic assets, which includes research stations and supporting infrastructure. In recognition of the critical nature of many of the assets required to support a robust and safe Antarctic program, this infrastructure funding is ongoing and represents a significant increase over current funding levels.

This work is consistent with the Government's long term commitment in the Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan to implement an overhaul, as needed, of the infrastructure of our

Antarctic research stations to create a station network which is efficient, flexible and suited to our future needs.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government release the review into Antarctic science governance as soon as practicable and provide a public response to its findings and recommendations in a timely manner.

Government Response

Agreed. The Australian Government released the review into Antarctic science governance by Mr Drew Clarke AO PSM FTSE, and the Government's response, on 21 June 2018. It is available at: <http://www.environment.gov.au/antarctic-review>.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provide clarity on how different sources of Australian Government Antarctic science funding can be utilised by funding recipients including whether such sources can be used for project or ancillary research support purposes.

Government Response

Agreed. The major funders of scientific research in the Antarctic, namely the Australian Research Council (which administers the Special Research Initiative in Excellence in Antarctic Science, announced in the 2018 Budget and commencing in January 2020), the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science (which administers the Antarctic Science Collaboration Initiative, announced in the 2018 Budget and commencing in July 2019), and the Department of Environment and Energy (which administers Australia's Antarctic Science Program) will develop and publish information on the various sources of funding for undertaking scientific research in the Antarctic and the timelines for applying for the funding. The information will include what the funding can be used for and in particular whether the funding can be used for project or ancillary research support purposes.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consider the establishment of a body to determine both Antarctic science project priorities consistent with the Australian Science Strategic Plan 2011–12 to 2020–21 and to provide a forum for overseeing the coordination of projects.

Government Response

Agreed. The Australian Government announced its intention to establish an Australian Antarctic Science Council on 21 June 2018 to provide further strategic direction for the Australian Antarctic Program and oversee science funding priorities for Antarctic research. The Council is expected to be established in 2019.

<http://www.antarctica.gov.au/news/2018/new-australian-antarctic-science-council>

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consider mechanisms by which the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre can continue its operations in collaborative Antarctic science beyond June 2019. The Australian Government may consider opportunities to work with the Tasmanian Government to consider how the work of the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre can continue.

Government Response

Agreed. The Australian Government announced the establishment of an Antarctic Science Collaboration Initiative (ASCI) on 21 June 2018.

The ASCI, commencing on 1 July 2019, will provide \$50 million in funding towards Australia's Antarctic science efforts over the coming decade, building on the work of the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre. The ASCI program will provide stable and long term funding, providing certainty for critical Antarctic science jobs in Hobart.

The Department of Industry, Innovation and Science will work with the Australian Antarctic Division, other Antarctic research partners, the Tasmanian Government and other key stakeholders over the coming months to design the new ASCI program.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government assess how Australia can retain and further develop its Antarctic science workforce to ensure long term objectives under the Australian Antarctic Science Strategic Plan 2011–12 to 2020–21 can be met. Such an assessment should consider opportunities to leverage cooperation from commercial and philanthropic entities, as well as jointly funded international ventures. The results of this assessment should be incorporated into future iterations of the Australian Antarctic Science Strategic Plan.

Government Response

Agreed in principle. The Australian Government, through the Department of the Environment and Energy's Australian Antarctic Division (AAD), guided by the Australian Antarctic Science Council, will consider opportunities to retain and further develop its Antarctic science workforce to ensure long term objectives under the Australian Antarctic Science Strategic Plan including leveraging cooperation from commercial and philanthropic entities, as well as jointly funded international ventures. In addition the AAD and the Australian Antarctic Science Council will work with the newly established Antarctic Science Foundation to establish partnerships with the philanthropic and private sector to enhance opportunities for Antarctic science.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the Department of the Environment and Energy, consider a whole of government data management strategy to manage its store of Antarctic data as a matter of priority. In the short term, the Committee recommends that Geoscience Australia and the Australian Antarctic Division put forward a business case for an 'Antarctic Geoscience Data Cube' that could be included in an expanded version of the Digital Earth Australia program, and any other necessary data management infrastructure—including the tools Australia requires to access, read, and use data from other countries' Antarctic research.

Government Response

Agreed. The Australian Government currently supports the Australian Antarctic Data Centre (AADC) to manage and facilitate access to all data derived from all scientific activities conducted under the auspice of the Australian Antarctic Program. Through the AADC, Australia liaises with all other Antarctic nations to facilitate discovery, access and use of data from all Antarctic research. A business case to expand the capability of the Digital Earth Australia (DEA) program to include an 'Antarctic Geoscience Data Cube' is being considered in the context of other whole-of-government priorities for the DEA, and the Government's in principle support for the recommendation from the Clarke Review to "...develop a comprehensive data model of the Australian Antarctic Territory".

<http://www.environment.gov.au/antarctic-review>

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the Department of the Environment and Energy develop a centrally coordinated repository of Antarctic science agreements which also capture the registration of any relevant intellectual property rights.

Government Response

Agreed in principle. The Australian Government, through the Department of the Environment and Energy's Australian Antarctic Division, is developing a centrally coordinated repository of Antarctic science agreements.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that the Australian Antarctic Division in conjunction with the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities, work with the Tasmanian Government and local government to outline the key Antarctic priorities under the Hobart City Deal including a broad funding agreement and project timeline, particularly with reference to the Macquarie Point Antarctic Precinct.

Government Response

Agreed in principle. The Hobart City Deal signed on 24 February 2019, commits the Australian, Tasmanian and local governments to work together on a number of focus areas to build on Hobart's world-class standing as a gateway to the Antarctic and Southern Ocean.

The Hobart City Deal includes commitments to Antarctic priorities, including \$450 million over the 10-year span of the City Deal in additional capital expenditure to upgrade Australia's Antarctic research station network and a commitment to facilitate an Antarctic and Science Precinct at Macquarie Point. The Australian and Tasmanian Governments will work together on a business case for the creation of an Antarctic and Science Precinct with the objective of attracting to Macquarie Point national and private Antarctic and Southern Ocean institutions.

The parties to the Hobart City Deal will prepare an Implementation Plan by August 2019, setting out commitment responsibilities and milestones.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade identify or establish an appropriate federal mechanism to create an Office of Antarctic Services. Such an office would oversee the promotion of Australia, and in particular Hobart, as an Antarctic gateway and hub to international Antarctic programs.

Government Response

Not agreed. The Australian Government has a range of means through which it promotes Australia and Hobart in particular as an Antarctic gateway and hub to international Antarctic programs. This is primarily done through DFAT and Austrade (through their State Offices in Tasmania) and the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) of the Department of the Environment and Energy working closely with the Tasmanian State Government, particularly its Department of State Growth, and the Tasmanian Polar Network. DFAT assists the State Government with its international engagement, including with trade missions, taking advantage of DFAT's diplomatic network. Austrade promotes Australia and Australian capability internationally, including promoting Australia as a destination for business, investment and tourism. Through its Hobart office, Austrade promotes Australian companies that are part of the Antarctic industry to other nations and assists the State Government with trade missions.

The AAD works closely with other national Antarctic programs to promote Australia's Antarctic leadership, including the value of Hobart as an Antarctic gateway, and regularly hosts meetings with international counterparts in Hobart. DFAT and AAD's membership of the Tasmanian Polar Network ensures good coordination with the business community in promoting their services and the Antarctic gateway.

Australian Government agencies work effectively to coordinate these roles and will consider ways to strengthen the promotion of Hobart as appropriate. A new Office of Antarctic Services risks duplicating functions and the Government therefore does not propose at this stage to establish a new mechanism.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that the Australian and Tasmanian Governments work with other nations' Antarctic programs that have or seek to have a presence in Hobart to ensure that their requirements are met through the provision of relevant infrastructure and services.

Government Response

Agreed. The Australian Government will continue to work with the Tasmanian State Government and other national Antarctic programs to promote Hobart as the premier East Antarctic Gateway. Where appropriate this will include identifying countries' requirements necessary to establish, or continue to have, a presence in Hobart.

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities, consider providing assistance to TasPorts to

improve the viability of the proposal to use a fuel barge to bring fuel from Self's Port to the port of Hobart.

Government Response

Noted. Access to fuel in Hobart for national Antarctic Program's other than Australia is a matter between the Tasmanian State Government, TasPorts and those programs.

The Australian Government, via the Department of the Environment and Energy's Australian Antarctic Division (AAD), receives marine bunker services for its chartered vessels and conducts an open market Request for Tender (RFT) process for these services every three to five years in accordance with the Commonwealth Procurement Rules. The AAD is always looking for options for improving the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the Australian Government's Antarctic shipping operations, and a bunker barge with suitable storage capacity and pump rates to meet the *RSV Nuyina's* requirements for bulk marine, cargo and aviation fuel might represent such an option.

The Australian Government would support the further development of such an option by the private sector and would welcome the opportunity to review options in future open market RFT processes for marine bunker services.

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the Department of the Environment and Energy, consider ways in which the work of the Australian Antarctic Program can be given further prominence. In doing so, consideration should be given to the needs of visitors, the educational objectives to be communicated, and how Australia's national interests can best be served.

Government Response

Agreed. The Department of the Environment and Energy's Australian Antarctic Division is reinvigorating a branding strategy to raise the profile of the Australian Antarctic Program (AAP). This will ensure greater visibility for projects conducted by partner organisations and better reflect the scale and scope of the AAP. The renewed branding effort includes education and other outreach activities within Australia to raise the profile of the importance of Antarctica to Australians and our engagement with the icy continent. The reinvigorated branding strategy is consistent with the *Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan* which recognised that promoting understanding of Antarctica and the Antarctic Treaty system was a key way in which to advance our national Antarctic interests.