

# **ANTARCTIC BUY-IN FOR TASMANIA AND THE NATION**

**By John Brennan**

Anyone with an interest in Tasmania's contribution to the Antarctic and Southern Ocean could not help but notice the transformation happening around Hobart's waterfront.

New facilities on Macquarie Wharf for cruise and Antarctic shipping, the IMAS building, and in September a new ship managed by Australia to explore and understand the oceans surrounding Australia are consolidating Hobart as the largest support hub adjacent to the white continent and a true Gateway.

Government policy and investment in the Antarctic and Southern Ocean sector is a sound option for driving the Tasmanian economy to a stronger long term economic outlook. The sector neatly fits with the change that Tasmania arguably needs to make to adopt innovation and smart and low impact business as well as career path development.

The sector delivers direct and indirect economic outcomes and provides an impetus for private sector investment and growth through developments such as specialised equipment and retro fitting, specialised trade development, cold climate/remote medicine services for both Australian and other programs, as research hub for Antarctic and Southern Ocean expertise, specialised Antarctic and marine science education programs, and tourism.

There are a few points to highlight here.

Australia's Antarctic Division is the keystone on which Tasmania has built its Gateway reputation.

Significant international standing is created by Australia's political, economic, social, scientific and environmental investment in Antarctic and Southern Ocean activities, harnessing international partnerships, building on current infrastructure and investment and bolstering our leadership status within the Antarctic Treaty System;

The national, State and Hobart economies accrue significant benefits from Australia's Antarctic presence through private/public sector investment in equipment, logistics, research, education, tourism and resource management. Additionally, oceanographic and environmental surveys also attract international investment and expertise;

In Tasmania the Antarctic and Southern Ocean sector directly employs more than 1100 people. In 2011/12 it directly contributed \$187 million (or 0.7%) to the Tasmanian GSP. Average wages in the sector are significantly higher than the Tasmanian average, standing at \$118,400 per full-time employee in 2011/12 compared to a state average of \$63,590. This provides a significant flow-on effect to the Tasmanian economy, where spending by sector employees generated a further 1606 jobs and an additional contribution of \$256.9 million to the Tasmanian GSP, for a total contribution of 2791 jobs and \$444.2 million;

Working with Federal, State and Local governments, the Tasmanian Polar Network envisages a future where the sector's reputation will continue to attract and stimulate

economic, and social, benefits for Tasmania through the state's, and Hobart's, status as an internationally-acclaimed Antarctic Gateway;

The advent of Australia's Airlink between Hobart and Davis Station and our ability to share some shipping capability has brought many Chinese, Korean, US and Italian expeditioners through Hobart.

Hobart is the home port for the 24-year-old RSV *Aurora Australis*, which conducts research voyages into the Southern Ocean and the Antarctic sea ice zone, as well as the future home port of the RV *Investigator*, which is currently under construction and will come into service as a CSIRO National Research Facility later in 2013.

It is vital that Hobart maintains its pre-eminent position in oceanographic, Antarctic and climate research both on the national scale and on the international scene. This requires that funding is maintained and preferably increased for the relevant organisations. The recent announcement of a further 5 years of funding for the ACE CRC was welcome, and removed the uncertainty regarding its future and the job security of the research and research support staff employed therein. However, the ACE CRC will be in the same position of uncertainty 5 years down the track.

The relocation of IMAS into the port precinct of Hobart offers an opportunity to rebadge Hobart as a marine university town, and compare well with other such centres around the world (e.g., Southampton, Bremerhaven, San Diego, Woods Hole).

With growing pressure on the AAD operating budget, the first thing that must necessarily be cut will be the surplus capacity which we are able to share with other nations in exchange for their surplus capability. It will also greatly reduce the amount of high quality scientific research in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean that can be supported, raising the risk of other investments in IMAS and the CRC going to waste..

The sector is at a crossroads. With disinvestment in place for the Australian Antarctic program, the potential attraction for other nations to interact with the sector in Tasmania will diminish.

The sector's economic window presently stands open for Australia, pending decisions over the next five years by nations such as China, the United States, and the Republic of Korea on where they will stage and support their Antarctic programs; For example, *enhanced fuel procurement, storage and refuelling capability in Hobart which would attract a number of northern hemisphere nations to bring their Antarctic vessels through Hobart: possibly including the lucrative US.*

The Tasmanian Polar Network believes that, with the correct policy support and investment, Tasmania and the sector can benefit from the interest being shown by other nations in East Antarctica. The next growth opportunity for Tasmania will undoubtedly arise from the recent focus of international Antarctic programs to increase their collaboration, science and logistics. This trend is being driven by a number of factors including reduced operating budgets and the willingness of other nations to leverage off and share resources.

We cannot be complacent. Tasmania is not the only option for international programs to stage their operations or obtain logistical support into East Antarctica. Both South Africa

and New Zealand compete for this business and in some respects are both better equipped with infrastructure to support sea and air logistics.

If Australia, through Tasmania, does not plan, commit and prepare now, it will find itself unable to offer these nations the necessary infrastructure and support, as well as collaboration opportunities for science and research;

Alternatively, expanded investment, led by Government and supported by the private sector, will re-enforce Australia's role, standing and international commitment to Antarctic and Southern Ocean governance, management, science and education. This will attract expertise and foster a positive climate on which to expand Tasmania's unique Antarctic Gateway, one built on a century of Australian Antarctic exploration, research and management.

To optimise Australia and Tasmania's opportunities as an international centre *par excellence* for integrated Antarctic and Southern Ocean research facilities and logistic capability, as well as the supply of relevant goods and services, investment is required now.

**John Brennan**  
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