



Community and Public Sector Union

Nadine Flood – National Secretary

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Committee Secretary
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

Australia's future activities and responsibilities in the Southern Ocean and Antarctic waters

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) is an active and effective union committed to promoting a modern, efficient and responsive public sector delivering quality services and quality jobs. We represent around 55,000 members in the Australian Public Service (APS), other areas of Commonwealth Government employment, ACT Public Service, NT Public Service, ABC, SBS and CSIRO. The CPSU is the major union representing employees in Australian Antarctic Division (AAD), based in Hobart.

The CPSU welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry on Australia's future activities and responsibilities in the Southern Ocean and Antarctic waters.

CPSU members have raised concerns about the levels of appropriate resourcing in the Southern Ocean and Antarctic territory for research and governance. The AAD is undergoing significant staff losses and Budget cuts are affecting its operational capacity. Similarly, the CSIRO is also facing significant Budget cuts, particularly to marine and atmosphere research. Additional funding announced by the Government will not mitigate the impact of these cuts or allow new Antarctic vessels to operate at full capacity.

Australian Antarctic Division (AAD)

Loss of staff

Staffing levels at the AAD vary seasonally due to research requirements. However, prior to the commencement of staffing cuts, staff numbers were approximately 400 full time equivalent (FTE) positions averaged across the 12 months. The AAD has

experienced, and continues to undergo significant staff losses as a result of wider cuts to the Department of the Environment, contrary to reports by the Minister. At present, the AAD is going through its third round of voluntary redundancies since April 2013. The loss of approximately 20 staff from the first round of redundancies is still being felt and it will only worsen. Although figures from the current round are not yet available, it appears that in excess of 40 staff will be lost from the Division from the three rounds.

The next stage of staff losses, termed 'capability assessment', is targeted at Executive Level 1 and 2 staff, which includes senior scientists. It is unclear how many individuals will be involuntarily retrenched through this process. However, the wider Department of Environment intends to reduce numbers by 250 this year, with another 230 to go in later years. The AAD workforce constitutes a fifth of the Department of Environment's total staff and will be impacted by cuts of this magnitude.¹

Compounding the losses of ongoing staff is a recruitment freeze on non-ongoing positions at the AAD. This has resulted in further losses as contracts have expired (or been terminated early) with only a small number being renewed. Again no official figures are available, but members advise that at least 20 non-ongoing staff have been lost through this process on top of redundancies.

The AAD is structured into several branches based on their functions within the organisation. Staff losses through the redundancy process have been spread throughout the AAD, including the science, administrative and policy sections. Losses of non-ongoing staff have struck the science branch particularly hard. Historically the science branch has employed the majority of non-ongoing staff. Typically these are junior scientists and field researchers employed for the duration of a specific project.

A reduction in staffing levels of this magnitude constrains the ability of the AAD to perform all of its functions. The uniqueness of the Antarctic working environment means that the AAD relies on specialists who are willing to endure the harsh realities of living and working in the Antarctic. For example, in the science branch, the loss of senior scientists and many of the field researchers will have an immediate impact on the forthcoming summer field season. At present, several research projects may not be properly staffed.

Similar problems are being felt throughout the AAD including the administrative, policy and operational areas. In some areas, the rapid departure of managers has left remaining staff in disarray as there was no time for orderly hand-overs or succession planning.

The AAD is also struggling to retain younger staff with Antarctic experience who previously saw a future career in Antarctic work. These younger staff represent the future of the AAD and the impact of their loss is immense.

¹ Based on 2014-15 Budget figures, the AAD had 403 ASL in 2013-14. This was 20.2% of the Department of Environment's total ASL of 1,993

Impact of Budget cuts on operational capacity

The Government's requirement to reduce public expenditure has not only impacted staffing levels. The AAD has a \$12 million dollar budget shortfall and much of this will have to be found through savings in operating costs. It will impact on the Division's ability to perform its functions, for example, leading to a further curtailment of the ship-based marine science program.

The Government has also imposed other measures to reduce spending, which affect the AAD's ability to carry out important responsibilities. For example, new arrangements for international travel approvals have significantly reduced international representation, diminishing Australia's capacity to fulfil its international responsibilities in relation to Antarctica. There have been several recent meetings that have either been cancelled, or have only gone ahead with a reduced level of representation from Australia. Therefore these cuts already threaten Australia's international influence and standing, and this effect will only increase as funding reduces further.

The recent announcement regarding funding for the construction of a new icebreaker to replace *RSV Aurora Australis* is welcome news,² however, at present the AAD is unable to fully utilise the existing vessel. Operating costs are extremely high, and AAD does not have the funds to use the vessel for much more than the essential task of re-supplying the stations. In past years, it was the practice to perform at least one dedicated marine science voyage each season, and often two marine science voyages would be run. Today the AAD is able to run a marine science voyage only every second season.

Even if ship-time was available for a research voyage, due to a number of specialised marine technical staff taking VRs, the Division no longer has enough staff to maintain and operate the shipboard equipment. Before the new vessel arrives, the AAD will need to recruit a number of highly specialised staff to install, calibrate and commission a full set of scientific instruments and sampling equipment.

If the AAD is to maintain its role of leading Australia's Antarctic program, it needs to be adequately resourced and staffed. Under the current budgetary pressure, remaining staff are being pressed to do more with less, a situation that is clearly unsustainable. Without additional funding, the AAD will be forced to scale back even further its activities and Australia's responsibilities in the Antarctic and Southern Oceans.

² The Hon. Greg Hunt MP, New icebreaker is a strong boost for Antarctic research and good news for the Tasmanian economy, 19 May 2014, <http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/hunt/2014/mr20140519.html>

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)

Impact of Budget cuts

In the recent 2014-15 budget, the Federal Government announced the biggest cut to CSIRO's appropriation funding in recent memory – some \$111.4 million over four years. The organisation will also be hit by a separate 'efficiency dividend' cut of \$3.4 million over the forward estimates.³

The CSIRO also faces indirect reductions in funding due to budget cuts to other Government departments and programs. For example, The Australian Climate Change Science Program will be folded into a New National Environmental Science Program, with an associated funding cut of \$21.7 million.⁴ It has been estimated that CSIRO will lose up to \$4 million in funding as a result of this measure.

Following the budget, Chief Executive Dr Megan Clark confirmed that as a result of the funding cut, CSIRO would lose another five hundred full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, make deep cuts to research and be forced to close laboratories and sell off properties.

In the CSIRO's Annual Directions Statement, Dr Clark outlined the areas of research facing cuts or total abandonment as a result of declining funding. Marine and atmospheric research was one of these areas.⁵

Cuts to marine and atmospheric research

A focus on fisheries and marine research has been a priority for CSIRO since the organisation's origins. The vast majority of this research has focussed on the Southern Ocean, with marine scientists and support staff based in Hobart. In more recent decades, the proximity of the Southern Ocean has allowed CSIRO's atmospheric researchers to become world leaders in the science of anthropogenic climate change.

Marine science has been particularly hard hit by the Budget, with Dr Clark confirming that CSIRO plans to cut research into bathymetry, terrestrial biodiversity, marine biodiversity and marine habitat mapping.⁶

In formal advice provided to CPSU (CSIRO Section) in early June 2014, management from CSIRO's Marine and Atmospheric Division (CMAR) stated that 'reshaping of research delivered by CMAR capability means that there is a need to reduce research capability.' These cuts to marine and atmospheric research would result in the loss of 31 FTE staff, the majority of these being research scientists

³ Commonwealth Government, CSIRO Budget Statements 2014-15, pp.193,

<http://www.industry.gov.au/AboutUs/Budget/Documents/PBS-2014-15.pdf>

⁴ Commonwealth Government, Expense Measures: Environment Portfolio, Federal Budget 2014-

15, http://www.budget.gov.au/2014-15/content/bp2/html/bp2_expense-11.htm

⁵ Office of Dr Megan Clark, CSIRO Annual Directions Statement 2014, May 2014, pp.12

<https://csirostaffassociation.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/csiro-annual-directions-statement-2014-15.pdf>

⁶ Office of Dr Megan Clark, CSIRO Annual Directions Statement 2014, May 2014, pp.12

<https://csirostaffassociation.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/csiro-annual-directions-statement-2014-15.pdf>

based in Hobart, home to CMAR's headquarters.⁷ CMAR management also provided further detail of the areas of science capability facing reductions.

This means cuts to research into coastal modelling, ocean climate processes, biochemical processes, coasts and oceans biodiversity and ecosystem dynamics, pelagic spatial and population dynamics, marine risk assessment, atmospheric chemistry and climate, climate modelling, climate variability, climate projections, genomics and science engineering.⁸

New funding will not mitigate losses

The CPSU notes that the Federal Government used the 2014-15 Budget to announce several funding measures aimed at boosting Australia's presence in the Antarctic. This included \$24 million for a new Antarctic Gateway Partnership, with the aim of encouraging collaboration between the University of Tasmania, the CSIRO and the Australian Antarctic Division.⁹

While more funding is welcome, none of this investment will mitigate the substantial loss of science capabilities in the CSIRO and the AAD due to Budget cuts.

New vessels will not operate at full capacity

The CSIRO will also receive an additional \$65.7 million over the forward estimates for the Marine National Facility to operate the new research vessel, the *RV Investigator*. The CSIRO, however, will have to provide matched funding of \$21.2 million from within its existing resources to keep the new boat afloat.¹⁰

The funding is estimated to cover operations of the *RV Investigator* for 180 days at sea each year – substantially less than the anticipated capacity of 300 days per year. This lost opportunity to undertake critical research in the Southern Ocean will over time, diminish the standing of Australian marine research in the global science community.

⁷ CPSU CSIRO Section, Budget cuts hit climate and marine research, jobs in Tasmania and Victoria hardest hit, 10 June 2014, <http://cpsu-csiro.org.au/2014/06/10/budget-cuts-hit-climate-and-marine-research-jobs-in-tasmania-and-victoria-hardest-hit/>

⁸ CPSU CSIRO Section, Budget cuts hit climate and marine research, jobs in Tasmania and Victoria hardest hit, 10 June 2014, <http://cpsu-csiro.org.au/2014/06/10/budget-cuts-hit-climate-and-marine-research-jobs-in-tasmania-and-victoria-hardest-hit/>

⁹ The Hon. Greg Hunt MP, New icebreaker is a strong boost for Antarctic research and good news for the Tasmanian economy, 19 May 2014, <http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/hunt/2014/mr20140519.html>

¹⁰ Commonwealth Government, Expense Measures: Industry Portfolio: Federal Budget 2014-15, http://www.budget.gov.au/2014-15/content/bp2/html/bp2_expense-17.htm

The Budget cuts to the CSIRO and the AAD are short-sighted and will do lasting harm. These cuts undermine both Australia's strong track record of research in the Southern Ocean and Antarctic, and our international standing.

If the Committee requires further information from the CPSU in relation to the matters raised in this submission, please contact Kristin van Barneveld, Director of Research via email
or on

Yours sincerely

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