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

Subject: Submission by the Tasmanian Polar Network

The Tasmanian Polar Network welcomes the invitation to make a submission to the inquiry and report into the adequacy of Australia's infrastructure assets and capability in Antarctica with regard to:

- maintaining national interests;
- serving the scientific program into the future;
- international engagement, including collaboration and resource sharing with other countries;
- fostering economic opportunities consistent with the Antarctic Treaty System obligations; and
- environmental considerations.

Industry Background

The Tasmanian Polar Network (the TPN) is a group of businesses and scientific organisations based in Tasmania Australia, that all have a common focus on serving commercial and scientific activity in the Antarctic, sub-Antarctic and Southern Ocean.

The organisations that make up the TPN are all uniquely positioned through their geographical location, expertise and resources to serve the broadest possible range of activities in the region. We are based in Australia's most southern city - Hobart, and enjoy one of the world's deepest and best served commercial ports for Antarctic shipping operators.

Tasmania has a 23 year long and proud history of serving commercial and scientific activity in the Antarctic, sub-Antarctic and Southern Ocean. Through our member organisations, the TPN has long provided leadership and a unified voice for these endeavours, and looks forward to serving all those who wish to participate in scientific and economic activity within the region long into the future.

Economic Benefit of Antarctic and Southern Ocean Sector

In 2015-16 the contribution of the Antarctic and Southern Ocean (ASO) sector contributed \$180.6 million to Tasmania's GSP and directly employed 755 FTEs. This is according to a 2016 analysis published in the Wells Report on economic benefits of the ASO sector, and commissioned by the TPN.

The sector is set to expand in the next 5 years with significant investment in:

Aviation:

- the Hobart Airport runway extension, which will provide capacity for larger aircraft servicing Antarctica and expanded Antarctic aviation opportunities

Shipping:

- three new larger vessels – two Australian and one French based in Hobart.
- Associated infrastructure upgrades, maintenance and logistics requirements

Construction:

- upgrading Macquarie Island research station
- AAD's inland traverse capability
- potential modernisation of Australia's three Antarctic research stations

These will lead to significant opportunities for Tasmanian businesses in areas including engineering, construction, fabrication, waste management, provedoring, power generation, specialised equipment manufacture and maintenance.

If Tasmanian firms are able to win 25% of this expenditure, there would be an injection of \$10million pa into the Tasmanian economy, a 27% increase over 2015/16.

Future growth can also be expected in:

- provedoring for international ASO operations which are currently focussed on French and Italian programs, but which in the future may also include Chinese, Korean and American programs
- provision of specialised equipment such as sleds, tractors and mobile accommodation to international ASO programs.

Infrastructure Assets in Antarctica

The potential growth of the ASO sector in Tasmania and its contribution to the state's economy and community are closely linked to the Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan. For this reason, the TPN is of the firm view that the development and maintenance of infrastructure assets in the Australian Antarctic Territory are of vital importance to our industry, as they position Australia as a leader in Antarctica, and provide valuable business opportunities in Tasmania.

Our immediate suggestion is to address the following items:

Traverse capability

Australia's Antarctic program needs to develop modern and well equipped traverse capability, as well as station support for such capability and winter storage for equipment. This may consist of suitable equipment, machinery, buildings and personnel to operate efficient traverses for supplies and science. This capability will

enable Australia to successfully engage in international collaboration in ice core research, among other science areas.

Vessel capability

The Australian Government's investment in the lifecycle of the new icebreaker is highly commended as it will be required to ensure efficient marine science and resupply operations.

In support of the vessel it is essential that shore infrastructure at both ends (Hobart and in Australian stations) are upgraded and maintained at a standard that permits the new vessel to reach its maximum efficiency and minimise operational time at each base. This includes ensuring stations are equipped to handle the increased cargo flow, and to maximise science utilisation of the vessel. Infrastructure assets affected include wharves, jetties, maritime support services, loading equipment/cranes, stevedoring operations etc.

Aviation

With the new deployment of the RAAF C17 Globemaster the Australian Antarctic program has entered a new era of supply to Antarctica. We ask that Government confirms the continuing development of the passenger jet and heavy lift capability by supporting the development of associated infrastructure in Hobart and further developing the Wilkins blue ice runway and facilities in Antarctica.

In relation to future airfield development we ask that Government take seriously the development of a second, year round runway near Davis Station to provide leadership in international aviation access to East Antarctica. Such a development would enable Hobart to be further developed into an international Antarctic aviation hub and offer opportunities for other national programs from China, India and others to operate their programs through Hobart. This would strengthen our Antarctic gateway and provide substantial additional economic benefit to Tasmania and Australia. The Hobart Airport's runway extension program and associated federal funding would be maximised as a result. Hobart Airport is currently investigating the feasibility of developing associated infrastructure at the airport to support Antarctic and freight operations.

Science funding

The TPN is acutely aware that current science funding under the Antarctic Ecosystems & Climate CRC and the Antarctic Gateway Partnership programs are drawing to an end. It is critical that the Australian Government develop a sustainable science funding model for the future, so that efficient cutting edge science can be conducted into the future. The infrastructure assets deployed in Antarctica are all in service to science and research, and it is vital that such research continues into the future. This will assist with confirming Australia's role as a leading nation in Antarctica, and provide economic as well as diplomatic benefits. The TPN believes that infrastructure investment without sustainable and ongoing science investment is not viable or sensible.

Tourism Infrastructure

Currently the only tourism into Antarctica from Hobart is by expedition cruise, and soon the Antarctica overflight will also depart from Hobart. Based on growing demand for new Antarctic tourism experiences we recommend to investigate the development of tourism infrastructure alongside a tourism policy for the Australian Antarctic Territory, especially aviation-based tourism.

It is understood that current opportunities for aviation tourism to east Antarctica do not exist and would potentially impact substantially on the operational capacity of the Australian Antarctic Division's science and research programs. It may be beneficial to explore the commercial opportunities for an aviation tourism operation into east Antarctica and the infrastructure assets that would be required to offer tourism services without impacting on the operational capacity of the AAD.

Infrastructure renewal/modernisation

The TPN welcomes the recently commenced renewal program for the Macquarie Island station. This is an example of a positive process and the ASO sector has been actively involved in participating in the process so far.

As the modernisation program for Australia's Antarctic stations continues TPN asks you to ensure that environmentally cutting edge design and technology is applied to all station and equipment renewal. In order to achieve maximum value from our Antarctic stations, we must apply the highest levels of sustainability and use of renewable energy in the design and operations. In addition, we ask that you ensure that the logistics component of the station modernisation process is fully understood prior to any design and construction process. In the case of Macquarie Island, the limitations of access are severe and any station design would need to take this into account.

We also ask that every business opportunity for Tasmania and Australia is considered in the removal and repatriation of materials, waste and other items during the modernisation program. For example, Tasmania has invested in a new waste facility that can receive high grade waste and should be utilised for our RTA waste where possible.

Antarctic infrastructure investment in Tasmania

The TPN also wishes to raise and emphasise the potential for future infrastructure investment in the ASO sector through the proposed Antarctic Innovation Precinct at Macquarie Point, Hobart. The precinct concept was developed as a collaborative effort by TPB, the State Government and key ASO stakeholders such as CCAMLR, CSIRO, AAD and IMAS/UTAS. The precinct concept offers a unique opportunity to potentially co-locate these organisations, or at least to create premises that create a 'real' engagement environment. An Antarctic innovation precinct would be ideally placed to future proof our industry and the Antarctic science sector and it could facilitate the workforce development that needs to happen to underpin the ASO sector's growth. We believe that Tasmania as the national and an international Antarctic gateway has a critical role to play in providing an infrastructure link to the Australian Government's Antarctic infrastructure assets.

Conclusion

The TPN commends the Government for its inquiry into infrastructure assets in the Australian Antarctic Territory and will continue to provide the highest level of support by offering its members' services and expertise to the sector.

We would be happy to speak to any of the above items, should you require further information.

Karen Rees
Chair
24 July 2017

