SUBMISSION 23

AUSTRALIA'S ANTARCTIC PROGRAM: ADEQUACY OF FUNDING

SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITOL AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES

UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

INTRODUCTION

Australia has both significant national interest, and international responsibilities in relation to the Antarctic and Southern Ocean. It has responsibility for an area of Antarctic territory at least as large as Australia itself. This nation has had a deep and abiding commitment to a program of research and discovery related activity in the Antarctic. The outputs of its programs in this area have been highly regarded internationally.

The University of Tasmania is Australia's most southerly university and one that has made a substantial commitment to research and teaching in the Antarctic and Southern Ocean. This has been one of the University theme areas since 1996. The Institute of Antarctic and Southern Ocean Studies and ancillary researchers in other Schools undertake research in the natural sciences (climate change, oceanography, life sciences and ecosystems), as well as law and policy matters. The University is seeking to build a global alliance of universities with research interests in the Polar Regions. We believe that there is significant potential for greater dialogue with partners in the northern hemisphere. The University's excellent partnership with the Australian Antarctic Division is very strong and highly valued as is its partnership with the CSIRO Division of Marine Science. We have joint PhD Scholarship programs with both organisations. Indeed, a significant feature of the former Antarctic CRC, and the present Antarctic, Climate and Ecosystem CRC, is the strength of the relationship between the core partners and their commitment to good collaboration.

This high order of collaboration in the CRC has led to the creation of a research activity that has produced excellent outcomes and attracted international recognition. It is clear from informal feedback from the CRC assessment of the submission for the Antarctic, Climate and Ecosystem CRC, that the collaboration had brought together an exceptional group of scientists who had a demonstrated history of high quality research outcomes. This collaborative research effort works at all levels of the respective organisations. There is a very high level of commitment to collaborative activities that will lead to the best possible outcomes.

The Antarctic is important to Tasmania. There is a very significant research capability in the state and this attracts both international agencies and researchers. The activities of national and international groups provide significant economic benefits to the state.

In terms of the imperative for collaboration between publicly funded research agencies and universities, it is this University's view, that what the Antarctic researchers and managers have done has been highly effective. The outcome of international review processes of Antarctic related research activities (either of the Antarctic CRC or the Antarctic program itself), have been warm in their praise of the research and the researchers. Australia thus, has a history of very good Antarctic research that has attracted many fine researchers. Furthermore, we have been able to cooperate effectively. The issue now is how we can move forward to ensure that we build on the strong foundation for the future.

THE FUTURE

i) Transport

A direct link between Hobart and the Antarctic will facilitate the movement of personnel between Tasmania and the Deep South. This will have a significant impact on the ease with which various research programs can be undertaken.

The University of Tasmania has offered an Honours Degree in Antarctic Studies for many years and this attracts significant student interest. We will introduce a full undergraduate degree in Antarctic and Southern Ocean Studies in the near future. We believe that this will be a very attractive and distinctive Tasmanian offering. In particular components of this course will attract international students. In the best of all possible worlds it would be ideal if there could be a more substantial air link similar to the US Hercules service out of New Zealand. This would allow small groups to undertake fieldwork in the Antarctic. However, we recognise that the current plans do not allow for this eventuality.

ii) Joint Appointments

The University of Tasmania and the CSIRO Division of Marine Research have established a number of jointly funded senior positions in Antarctic related research. We are shortly to announce a jointly funded Chair in Marine Science with a focus on the Southern Ocean and the Antarctic. The Professor will oversee the $5M (cash and in-kind) joint PhD program in Quantitative Marine Science.

This program will involve the normal research dissertation plus intensive course work in summer and winter schools. It will meet a national, indeed international need, for researchers with the appropriate skills in Quantitative Marine Science (this includes Antarctic science). The Australian Antarctic Division has offered their support for this program. The University is very supportive of such arrangements and we believe that these will expand in future.

iii) International collaboration

Research is increasingly global in nature and in order to maintain competitive in any field researchers need to be networked well internationally. This brings substantial benefits both in terms of researcher-researcher relationships, but also access to facilities. To play on the international scene we need to bring benefits with us – in the quality of people, in logistic support or access to specialised and/or innovative equipment and facilities. We will need to ensure that we give adequate resources to train people appropriately and equip them for the demanding tasks at hand.

CONCLUSION

There is much to applaud in the Australian Antarctic effort. We have achieved much in a collaborative manner. We can build on this for the future.

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