

Environment and Communications
Answers to questions on notice
Agriculture, Water and the Environment Portfolio

Question No: SQ21-001103
Hearing: Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Division/Agency: Australian Antarctic Division
Topic: Antarctica
Question Date: 16 July 2021
Question Type: Written

Senator Urquhart asked:

1. In relation to the Heard and McDonald Islands Marine Park, when is the review of the management plans due? Has any preliminary work commenced on those reviews?
2. What led to the decision by the Government to cancel its plans for a full rebuild of the infrastructure on Macquarie Island and instead go with renovation of existing buildings? Was this decision based on a recommendation from the AAD?
3. Can you please provide an update on the infrastructure upgrades to our research bases on Macquarie Island? How much has been spent to date?
4. In Minister Ley's media release from 28 November 2020 she announced \$450 million over the next ten years to upgrade Australia's Antarctic research stations and supporting infrastructure. Apart from Macquarie Island, what work has been done to progress this, what is each project and over what timeframe will the works be carried out?
5. What are the contingency plans if the Nuyina is not ready for the 2021-22 seas? I'm aware that the foreign flagged vessel the MPV Everest was commissioned for last season, however given there was a fire onboard the Everest during last season does this vessel remain an option for next season if the Nuyina is not ready?
6. If the Nuyina is not ready and a foreign flagged vessel (such as the MPV Everest) is commissioned again for the task, will the Department ensure there are at least trainee Australian seafarers on the vessel, given that its crew previously involved no Australian seafarers?

Answer:

1. The Federal Register of Legislation states that the current Heard Island and McDonald Islands Marine Reserve Management Plan (the Management Plan) is due to sunset on 1 April 2025.
 - a. Prescription 9.4.4 of the Management Plan states that the Director will audit the management plan's implementation before preparing the next management plan.
 - b. Preliminary work has not commenced on this audit.
2. **Macquarie Island change in scope** - After a detailed two year planning phase and after suffering delays arising from COVID restrictions, the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment concluded that the best option, within the allocated budget, was to renovate existing buildings, do a small amount of new builds and decommission older infrastructure.

The renovation plans will ensure the Macquarie Island station is a functional year-round facility that meets the long-term needs of the Australian Antarctic Program and its stakeholders.

3. **Macquarie Island project update** - The project was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works on 21 June 2021. Subject to committee approval, the project intends to commence construction works post the annual resupply voyage, which is due to depart in March 2022. Design finalisation and procurement for the first seasons will be completed by this stage.

The expenditure to date is \$9.0 million.

4. **\$450 million Antarctic Station and Infrastructure Upgrades** - On 28 November 2020, the Minister for the Environment announced the commencement of the master planning process for Davis Station. This is the first important step in the long term sustainable upgrade of Australia's Antarctic research stations. This master planning process supports the planning of work at all stations for the next 30 years.

The first year of the 10-year \$450 million funding commitment was 2020-21. In an effort to keep COVID-19 out of its Antarctic stations, the Australian Antarctic Division's (AAD) 2020-21 seasonal activities were restricted to sustainment only. As a result, the AAD was not able to undertake any major building construction activity at its stations during the 2020-21 Antarctic summer season.

Despite the restricted operational season, the AAD has been able to continue with some pre-existing capital and infrastructure works at all stations including:

- replacement of aging mechanical plant and equipment essential for core capability sustainment
- renewal of emergency response equipment across the station network, including replacement of medical equipment and a new medical facility to support remote deep field science programs
- procurement of science equipment to support major marine science voyage
- continued improvements to station drinking water quality, water production security and storage capacity to meet current drinking water standards
- stabilising aging bulk fuel systems and planning to modernise the infrastructure
- undertaking the planning, design and procurement of critical infrastructure replacement and upgrades for all stations
- finalising the AAD's 10-year capital works program to guide the stabilisation and upgrade of station infrastructure.

Major projects currently underway include:

Location	Project	Estimated Timeframes
Davis	Reverse Osmosis Desalination Plants	3 years
	3 rd water tank	2 years
	Emergency Powerhouse	2 years
	Old LQ accommodation project	3 years
Casey	Waste treatment plant upgrade project	1 year
	Fuel system gasket replacement project	3 years
	Redshed upgrade project	2 years
	Wharf and boat ramp upgrade project	4 years
	Site services replacement project	7 years
Wilkins	Wilkins replacement project	6 years
Mawson	Accommodation building renewal	2 years
	Water tank replacement project	3 years
	Fire system upgrade	3 years
	Fuel systems gasket replacement project	3 years
Field	Traverse medical facility	1 year
	Containerised medical facility	1 year
All Stations	Mechanical plant fleet renewal	Annual
	Aviation bulk fuel storage upgrade project	2 years
	Secondary satellite communications system project	2 years
	Radio console upgrade project	1 year
	Radio antenna and mast replacement project	5 years

5. The RSV Nuyina is currently scheduled to arrive in Hobart in late 2021. The AAD is investigating options for contingent shipping capabilities to support the Antarctic resupply of our stations.
6. Whilst the crewing of any vessels under charter to the AAD will be the responsibility of the ship operator, the AAD will ensure that it meets its obligations as a charterer of the vessel, ensuring crew engaged on vessels under charter to the AAD receive remuneration and conditions as per relevant Australian seafarer awards. The AAD will continue to provide support for trainees wherever possible into the future.