

The Inquiry Secretary
National Capital and External Territories Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



Dear Sir,

Inquiry into the Adequacy of Funding for Australia's Antarctic Program

The National Committee on Antarctic Research (NCAR) is a committee of the Australian Academy of Science, charged with fostering a designated branch of natural science in Australia and serving as a link between Australian scientists and overseas scientists in the same field. The Academy's committees work internationally through the International Council for Science (ICSU) and NCAR works most closely with the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) – an ICSU body. NCAR designates the Delegate and Alternate Delegate to SCAR and thus is able to exert a measure of influence on the development of research directions in Antarctic science.

For a nation of its size Australia is regarded internationally as running a first rate program of Antarctic scientific research across all of the main scientific disciplines. In terms of costs per paper, published figures presented to an Output Pricing Review conducted in 2000 indicated that costs were significantly lower than those in the UK – a nation seen to have a broadly comparable program. Partly this is because of the system of Australian Antarctic Research grants run by the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) that provides small sums (up to \$30,000) to university researchers who offer high quality science to the program. The total sum allocated is about \$700,000 annually.

NCAR notes that the AAD has increased the sum by some \$200,000 over the past five years, recognising the value of university research, but that money has come from its 'in-house' scientific activities. Each year partial support is given to over 50 projects with the balance of the required support having traditionally come from the Universities themselves. NCAR is concerned that, with the decline in funds available to university researchers other than in specifically targeted areas, this additional funding has decreased substantially over recent years with a resulting loss in research outputs. NCAR estimates, from a comparison of funding allocated with funding requested, of those projects that are seen to be highly appropriate for funding, that a shortfall of approximately \$400,000 exists. This shortfall will increase as the new air transport link to Antarctica and the expanded role of aircraft in the scientific exploration of the continent become operational.



Australian scientists are influential on the steering and other organising committees of a range of SCAR committees and other bodies concerned with Southern Ocean marine science and climate. NCAR believes that the benefits and international recognition gained from the inclusion of university-based scientists into the program is very high indeed. All Australian science in the Antarctic is carried out in accordance with the Government's four goals for the Antarctic; increase in funds for university-based research would enhance Australia's international standing in an area where it is already highly regarded.

Additional funds are required. A significantly larger sum annually would enable grants of a size more comparable with those obtained from grant-giving bodies to be made available to a greater number of scientists. As the Australian Research Council does not hold 'earmarked' funds for Antarctic science, the need for more sizeable grants is now pressing.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Allison', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Dr. Ian Allison
Chair, NCAR