

Getting your research application approved

When you apply to conduct any Antarctic or subantarctic research, your application is processed by AAD staff and assessed by research program leaders before being subjected to national and international assessment and environmental and other scrutiny prior to getting final approval. The AAD team responsible for coordinating this process, in the Science Planning and Coordination section, comprises Gwen Fenton, Jenny Foley, Debbie Brown, Ian Hawkins, Jenny Cole and Vicki Cochrane.

The time to apply is May and June for the season after next, which means that this year we are assessing projects for the 2004–05 season. The 18 month lead-time is needed for assessments, approvals and logistical planning.

Applications are open on the AAD's web site <<http://www.aad.gov.au/applications>> from early May till the end of June each year. The web site carries all the information you need, but remember to discuss your project with the relevant program leader before lodging an application.

It is important that the whole assessment process is transparent and all steps are clearly explained to applicants. Accountability requires that Commonwealth resources are not provided to research projects without a full prior assessment and a progress and/or final report by each successful applicant.

The approval process

Applications are initially peer reviewed for scientific merit, the career experience of chief investigators, and institutional support, and the project's relevance to the Antarctic Science Strategic Plan is assessed. Each chief investigator is then asked to comment on the peer review of their project. Progress or final reports of previous or related projects may also be assessed.

Scientific assessments of each project go to either the life science or physical science Antarctic Research Assessment Committees (ARAC). These committees have independent chairs and members, together with relevant program leaders and the AAD Chief Scientist. Their recommendations are provided to the Science Program Management Committee for final selection of projects to receive resourcing and/or funding through the Australian Antarctic Science Grants Program. Any ethics approvals (for animal and human research) are completed during this time.

Notification of a favourable or unfavourable scientific assessment is done in December, after which operational assessment can begin. Applicants are notified whether their project has all the approvals about 12 months after they first applied.

What support is available?

Grants are available under the Australian Antarctic Science Grants Program. There is an upper cash limit of \$30,000 (excluding GST), but actual operational support is substantial with an average value in excess of \$500,000 per project. AAS Grants support research undertaken by full or part-time researchers based at Australian universities, by university-funded staff in Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs), and by researchers in other Australian tertiary institutions.

Applicants employed in State museums and State-funded institutions must obtain prior approval from the AAD Chief Scientist before seeking AAS Grant support. Researchers employed by government agencies that normally undertake research, such as CSIRO or Geosciences Australia, are ineligible for AAS Grant support but may receive logistical support.

Future seasons

Science Planning and Coordination section also coordinates Expressions of Interest (EOIs) for future seasons. So if you have a plan to conduct a major research program in 2005–06 and beyond, the sooner you let us know, the better. Projects of this type are classed as 'resource determining' in nature and must be identified at least two years in advance of the nominated science season.



MIKE WOOLRIDGE



STEVE NICOL

This process is necessary to assist the Antarctic Division's long-term operational and science support planning.

Resource determining proposals include those involving:

- Significant levels of ship time
- Significant levels of helicopter time
- Support by fixed-wing aircraft
- Significant numbers of workboats, including inflatable rubber craft
- Diving facilities
- Critical dates
- Specially trained support personnel (for example, field training officers)
- Significant or unusual cargo

To find out more see <<http://www.aad.gov.au/default.asp?casid=3779>>

GWEN FENTON, SCIENCE PLANNING & COORDINATION, AAD

International collaboration

The Australian Antarctic science program benefits enormously from international collaboration. The numbers of partners will vary from year to year but in any given year more than half of all projects have international collaborators involved in the research. At times the projects are very large with many international partners, while others have less formal links. In the 2002–03 season there were collaborators from approximately 20 countries with over 80 institutions participating in Australian Antarctic research. The international collaborators came from the USA, Japan, Russia, Norway, China, UK, Canada, Italy, South Africa, Chile, Malaysia, France, Netherlands, Poland, Germany, Denmark, New Zealand, Egypt and Switzerland. These just list the formal links but many of the projects are part of global experiments which include many more international partners.

An example of the international collaboration last season was the Prince Charles Mountains expedition PCMEGA with a group of 35 scientists from Australia and Germany conducting a large field program (see articles on pages 2–7).