

New AAD facilities opened on Mawson station's 50 year anniversary

Friday February 13 2004, marked a major milestone in the Australian Antarctic program with the opening of a major redevelopment at the Kingston headquarters in Tasmania and celebrations to mark the 50th birthday of Australia's first permanent Antarctic station.

Special guests at the Kingston celebrations, hosted by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage Dr Sharman Stone, were Australia's Governor-General Major General Michael Jeffery, AC, CVO, MC (Ret'd) and his wife Marlena.

Expeditioners at Mawson were included in the event through a telephone hook-up where they relayed to the Governor-General and Mrs Jeffery how they were marking the occasion 5475 km away on the frozen continent.

In his address, Major General Jeffery told more than 100 invited guests and the many staff attending that Australia must 'lead the way forward with its Antarctic program – just as Sir Douglas Mawson had done in the early 1900s.

'This graduate of engineering and science was a man of immense courage and determination. And his exploits and travails are the stuff of legend,' Major General Jeffery said.

'Mawson demonstrated exceptional leadership. His efforts are widely seen as crucial to Australia's claim to nearly half of Antarctica. Back home he played a pivotal role in establishing government-led funding for Antarctic research. And he became a dogged lobbyist for a permanent presence on Antarctica.

'His efforts reached fruition with the establishment of a station in Mac.Robertson Land. That station was founded 50 years ago today with the raising of the Australian flag on the rocky shore of Horseshoe Harbour. Fittingly it was named Mawson – in honour of our greatest polar explorer.'

Major General Jeffery told the audience that with the opening of new facilities at Kingston following a \$6.2 million redevelopment, the Australian Antarctic Division – already considered an international centre of excellence – steps up to an even higher level of capability.

The upgrading includes world-class biological, ecological and atmospheric science research laboratories and a marine research



Above: Australia's Governor-General Major General Jeffery signs the visitor's book at the redeveloped AAD headquarters, with Dr Sharman Stone looking on. Right: Major General Jeffery addresses guests at the opening.

Right below: The photographic exhibition to mark the 50th anniversary on display at the AAD before moving to Canberra's Parliament House.

facility equal to the most advanced in the world for the study of Antarctic marine organisms. The new facilities also provide for important research into the potentially toxic effects of synthetic pollutants on Antarctica's ecology.

The Governor-General said: 'The Antarctic is vital to the future of our planet and we have a critical, ongoing role to play in its protection. It's an integral part of the planet ... but it's actually under threat on several fronts.'

He listed these threats as the plundering of some fisheries by pirates, global warming causing floating ice shelves on the Antarctic Peninsula to disintegrate and tourism – mostly in the form of a growing number of cruise ships.

'I believe these threats to the greatest wilderness on earth must be overcome and with Australia's continuing direct involvement.'

In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the founding of Mawson station, Major General Jeffery said he was delighted to name five of the refurbished buildings at the Kingston headquarters of the Australian Antarctic Division after members of Mawson's 1911-14 expedition. In addition to Mawson these men are John Davis King, Frank Wild, Frank Hurley and Walter Hannam. The new sci-



ence building is named after Charles Harrison – the only Tasmanian in Mawson's party.

A major highlight of the anniversary celebrations has been a photographic exhibition in the refurbished display area at Kingston which gives an amazing insight into the people and programs that have shaped the history of Mawson station.

The exhibition, the brainchild of key researcher and writer Elizabeth Haywood and designer Pauline deVos, will go on to display at Parliament House in Canberra in May before featuring in Tasmanian mid-winter celebrations in June. It is then off to the Australian Embassy in Norway later in the year.

SALLY CHAMBERS, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, AAD