

## From the Director

2001, THE CENTENARY YEAR FOR Australian Federation and the Australian Public Service, is also a great year for Antarctic anniversaries. Ninety years ago Sir Douglas Mawson and his party – the most successful Antarctic scientific expedition of the ‘heroic’ era – departed Hobart for the ice. It’s 40 years since Australia, in recognition of its leading part in bringing key parties together in the original Treaty negotiations, was given the honour of hosting the first Antarctic Treaty meeting in Canberra. Twenty years ago the Australian Antarctic Division completed its move to Hobart. The same city, in the same year, saw the establishment of new headquarters for the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. And a decade ago this year, the Madrid Protocol was adopted by the nations of the Antarctic Treaty.

Anniversaries can be useful. They’re an opportunity to take stock, to draw on the knowledge and experience from our past for building better programs for the future. It’s fitting that in this anniversary year we in the Australian Antarctic Division pause for a moment to consider our place in the scheme of things and what we need to do to make our Antarctic program more effective, more relevant and more beneficial to Australia and the world.

One of our key goals is to support the Antarctic Treaty system, under which umbrella nations have worked cooperatively in Antarctica in the peaceful pursuit of knowledge for over four decades. This year, in the 24th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in the Russian city of St Petersburg, Treaty nations took a big step forward in agreeing to set up a permanent secretariat for the Treaty in Buenos Aires, Argentina, ending 40 years of ‘temporary’ arrangements. In this as in many other Treaty discussions over the years, Australia has had a big part in the decision-making process. Our active and constructive participation in Treaty forums have cemented our reputation as a strong supporter of the Treaty system and a leading player in its processes.

At a time when international structures are under stress, the Antarctic Treaty system stands proud. Besides the Treaty itself, the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) and the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic

Treaty (the Madrid Protocol) are ambitious in their conception, their scope and their enormous geographical coverage. Yet they stand today as uniquely successful international agreements on cooperation and environmental conservation.

The continued success of these agreements depends on the continued willingness of participating nations to do the hard work in the field and the laboratory. Underlying Australia’s active role in the Treaty system is an ambitious research program demanding the highest commitment of its people.

This summer we will ship about 500 people into and out of the Antarctic. This is a major investment in people’s time and other resources that over the past couple of years has prompted us to look more seriously at a future air transport system to reduce transit time. It has placed further demands on our legendary inventiveness and innovation to find ways

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of gathering our field data at a distance, using remote sensing and automation. In this second issue of Australian Antarctic Magazine, we look at where this process is taking us.

Our research effort in 2001-2002 will take us on a major marine science cruise, part of an international climate variation study of water composition and quality, currents and ocean productivity. We will be drilling through the Amery Ice Shelf and retrieving moored buoys at the ice shelf face to find out more about how this major drainage basin works. We will be looking at sea ice thickness and other parameters such as pigment colour using a new microwave satellite reception system on the research vessel *Aurora Australis*. We will continue a long-term study of natural variability in penguin



PHOTO BY WAYNE PAPPS

survival as a tool for assessing the effects of krill and fin-fish fisheries. And we will be further fine-tuning the new ‘Lidar’ middle atmosphere laser probe at Davis, Antarctica, to gather data about the coldest part of the Earth’s atmosphere.

Our activities span over 10 million square kilometres or more of East Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. Not only across the globe, but up and down: our Lidar probes 90 km into the atmosphere and our ocean-probing instruments collect data from 6 kilometres below the sea surface – truly a huge slice of Planet Earth.

This is science on a grand scale, and Australians have long supported our significant endeavours in Antarctica. This is something we can be proud of. Providing Australia and the world with valuable insights into the state of our planet demands that we maintain high standards of scientific research and interpretation. This is the credibility test that Australia, as a leading Antarctic nation, must continue to meet. We are confident we can do it.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Tony Press'.