



A developing programme for the International Polar Year

The International Polar Year (IPY), running from March 2007 – March 2009, promises significant advances in polar research. The international programme of coordinated, interdisciplinary scientific research in the Arctic and Antarctic is outlined in A Framework for the International Polar Year at <<http://www.ipy.org/development/framework/>>.

The IPY is not a stand alone concept, but provides a framework for existing polar activities to plan intensive, coordinated observations over a short period and within six major themes:

- determine the present **environmental status** of polar regions;
- quantify and understand **change** in the polar regions;
- advance our understanding of **connections** between the poles and the rest of the globe;
- investigate the **frontiers** of science in the polar regions;
- use the unique **vantage point** of the polar regions to investigate from the Earth's inner core to the Sun and the cosmos beyond; and
- investigate the **cultural, historical, and social processes** of circumpolar human societies.

There was an overwhelming response by the research community to a call for 'expressions of intent' for IPY projects last year. By the January 2005 deadline, about 880 expressions of intent were received, 60% of which were for Arctic projects, 25% for Antarctic, and 15% for bipolar. The largest numbers of proposals were from biologists (165), glaciologists (145), meteorologists/climatologists (115) and geoscientists (110). About 90 proposals dealt with oceanography, 90 with social science, and smaller numbers with space science, education and data management.

The scope of the expressions of intent ranged from highly coordinated and internationally managed proposals, requiring considerable logistic support; to smaller collaborations between a few investigators. Many of the smaller proposals have synergies with the larger ones and it is envisaged that the IPY implementation will bring these proposals together.

Australians are leading three large, international Antarctic proposals:

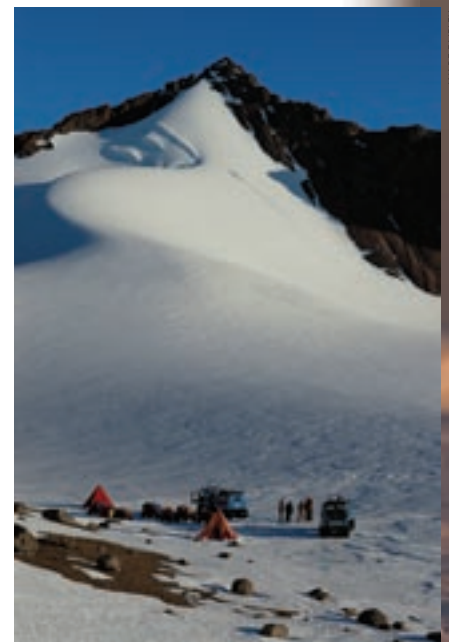
- *A Census of Antarctic Marine Life* (page 11);
- *Role of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean in Past, Present and Future Climate* – an oceanographic, meteorological, glaciological and biogeochemical project in the Southern Ocean and its margins; and
- *Geoscientific Insights of Greater Antarctica in the area from Gamburtsev Mountains, Amery Ice Shelf to Prydz Bay* – a multinational geoscientific project concerned with Earth evolution.

A Joint Committee for the IPY, sponsored by the International Council for Science and the World Meteorological Organisation, has been established to provide overall scientific planning, coordination, guidance and oversight. This committee met for the first time in March 2005, to assess the expressions of intent against IPY selection criteria, and to cluster them into a lesser number of large-scale and truly international core activities. About 40–50 expressions of intent were identified as possible 'lead projects' around which other proposals can be clustered or synchronized to form IPY core projects.

An international project office has also been set up to support IPY planning. This is funded by the UK Natural Environment Research Council and located at the headquarters of the British Antarctic Survey in Cambridge. An executive director of this office will be appointed soon.

While the large numbers of proposals submitted for IPY demonstrate the exciting opportunities for polar science, there may not be adequate resources (money or logistic infrastructure) for all the proposed projects to be undertaken within the short IPY period. IPY is not a funding agency and the management and implementation of IPY projects will need to be funded from various national or bilateral sources. A number of nations have already committed additional and specific research funds for IPY, but many more (including Australia) have not yet done so. More effort and planning is required before much of IPY becomes a reality, but the enthusiasm and commitment of the polar research communities will ensure that IPY does lead to significant new advances.

—IAN
ALLISON
*Co-Chair, Joint
Committee for the
International Polar
Year*



WADE FARLEY