

# In the spirit of cooperation

Those of us involved with Antarctica and the Southern Ocean know that it's not easy to get to know how the place works. We are dealing with complex physical and biological interactions over great distances and spanning millions of years, in a remote and harsh environment.

Improving our understanding of the part played by this region in global processes demands cooperation – between individuals and small groups working in the field and between nations with a common stake in the future well-being of our planet.

If there is any common theme in the story of human Antarctic endeavour, it has to be cooperation. I write this as I am about to set off to the 27th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in Cape Town, in May 2004.

The Antarctic Treaty, now in its fifth decade, is one of the most successful and enduring of all international agreements. Signed when the Cold War was at its chilliest, it brought together nations from opposite political poles in the common cause of cooperation in building a better understanding of our world.

Antarctic Treaty nations met for the first time in Canberra in 1961, a recognition of Australia's strong advocacy of international cooperation in the Antarctic. One of the twelve original signatories represented at that meeting was South Africa, whose hosting of the 2004 meeting will be a reminder of its own enduring commitment to Antarctic science through the difficult apartheid years and up to the present.

The unique success of this international agreement depends on the willingness of participating nations to work hard – not just in Treaty forums but also in the field and the laboratory.

This year, 2004, signals an important event in the history of Australia's involvement with Antarctica because it is the jubilee year of our oldest Antarctic station and the oldest of all permanent bases south of the Antarctic Circle.

When Mawson was established in 1954, Phillip Law believed that Australian involvement with the ice continent would prove of immense and lasting value to the nation and the world. How right he was. The success was due in part to our strength in international forums, but it was also because the men of the 1954 party



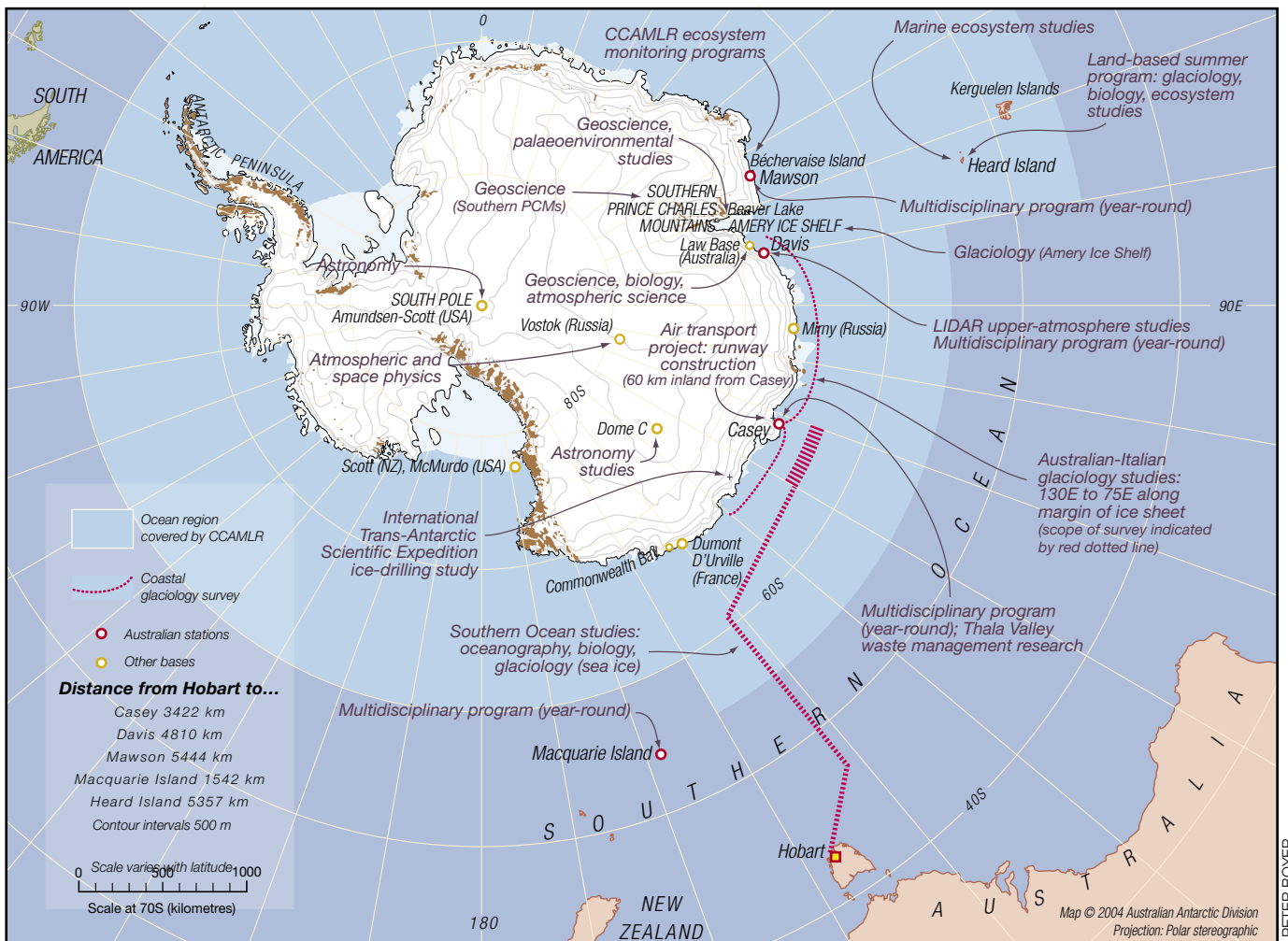
ANDREW JACKSON

Australian Antarctic Division Director and Chair of the Antarctic Treaty's Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP), Dr Tony Press, addresses delegates to the CEP VI meeting in Madrid in June 2003.

and those many hundreds of Australians who followed over the years brought a spirit of cooperation and mutual support, combined with sheer hard work, to their southern endeavours.

As we pass this milestone, we can reflect with pride on recent Australian Antarctic endeavours that have continued this great tradition.

We can look on the establishment in 2003 of the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre in Hobart. This CRC is



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based on collaboration between many institutions and researchers across many disciplines working together in to understand role of the Antarctic in global and regional processes. This venture is part of a much wider Australian imperative to pursue our understanding global climate change.

This year Antarctic research programs such as the International Trans-Antarctic Scientific Expedition ice-drilling study and the Australian-Italian sea ice program have emphasised our commitment to working with other nations in the field as well as in the conference room.

A summer research program on Heard Island produced some valuable evidence of the impact of climate changes over recent decades. Glaciologists found that in the past three years alone, Brown Glacier has retreated 50 metres, and slopes over most of its length have lost from four to eleven metres in thickness.

Our long-standing commitment to monitoring and assessing the ecological systems of the Southern Ocean has been maintained and strengthened by our biological work at sea and on Heard Island. Time-honoured programs of observing the feeding ecology of important

land-based predators such as seals, penguins and flying birds have continued to bring significant results, not least of which is valuable data supporting international moves to protect Southern Ocean ecosystems from illegal fishing.

The outstanding work of the albatross field research party on Heard Island, plotting in detail the feeding behaviour of two key species so graphically illustrated in this issue, is a case in point. This research was part of a much wider land-sea effort that looked in detail at the island's major predators and their prey, studies which provide us with a timely reminder of the vital connections between all forms of life.

We can reflect on the strides that have been taken over the past year or so in developing Australia's Antarctic air transport capability. A major step forward was taken in April 2004 with the delivery of the first C212-400 aircraft. The increased mobility and versatility offered by the aircraft will open up new opportunities for Australian Antarctic science, illustrated by the success over the 2003-04 summer of Canadian Twin Otter aircraft, used to transfer people between stations and enabling us to conduct comprehensive

science programs in some very remote places.

For the first time, the Australian Antarctic Division was able to resupply its three continental stations – Casey, Davis and Mawson – in a single voyage with the charter of MV *Vasily Golovnin*, increasing the availability of Aurora Australis for marine science research.

Australia's work to clean up its old rubbish sites in Antarctica has commenced in earnest with the clean-up of the Thala Valley tip site near Casey Station. This follows years of research into remediation of abandoned tip sites created in the days when we left behind most of what we took to Antarctica with little regard to its eventual effect on the environment.

I look forward to the 2004 Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting knowing that we have continued to do our bit in the great Antarctic cause. As we in the Australia's Antarctic program celebrate fifty continuous years in Antarctica, we can look back with pride on a year that has upheld the highest traditions of Antarctic cooperative endeavour.

*Tony Press*

## International scientific collaboration: let's maximise our efforts

Australia values the collaborations we already have in all areas of Australia's Antarctic science program enormously, but we are keen to establish more. The spirit of cooperation within the Antarctic Treaty is a fantastic springboard for collaborative scientific research. The more we can all work together and combine our logistic and scientific support, the better it will be for scientific knowledge of the Antarctic continent and Southern Ocean.

If you are interested in working with us in the Australian science program please contact us. Look at our web site at <<http://www.aad.gov.au>> and phone, fax or email us with your ideas for joint projects. In May each year we open science applications for the following season, i.e. in May 2004 we will call for applications for the 2005–06 season.

It always takes time to set up new collaborations but the first step is to start talking to us. Australia has just announced its new science strategic plan for the next five years and published it on the AAD website at <<http://www.aad.gov.au/default.asp?casid=13950>>. So please take a look and think about how we can work together. – GWEN FENTON, SCIENCE PLANNING & COORDINATION, AAD

