

# Behind every successful expedition ...



ROBB CLIFTON

The team photo (above) of members of PCMEGA and helicopters, tractors and the Twin Otter aircraft set against the backdrop of Mt Cresswell and the ice plateau is an evocative image of the most ambitious scientific field program conducted by the AAD in many years.

Almost at the other (eastern) end of Australia's operations, another proud field party posed before the camera at Cape Denison after completing their heritage conservation work on the nearby wooden huts used by Sir Douglas Mawson's Australasian Antarctic Expedition of 1911–14.

Between these geographical points nearly 3,000 kms apart, over 120 scientific projects were in progress, ranging from automated data collection in station laboratories to small groups of glaciologists, biologists, limnologists, ornithologists and botanists roaming away from the continental stations by over-snow transport, boats and by foot as participants in Australia's Antarctic Program.

Planning for even the simplest Antarctic science program begins two years before the departure of the ship. With more complex programs, positioning of essential equipment or aircraft fuel may mean an even longer lead time.

Once applications by Chief Investigators are approved by the Antarctic Research Assessment Committees, the projects are

considered by members of the Operations Science Support Working Group in the Operations Branch. Their job is to assess the operational support requirements of all approved programs and assign radios, first aid kits, specialist clothing, food and cooking equipment, tents and field huts, vehicles and aircraft as well as trades support and advice to aspiring scientists. Additional field guides may also be required to guarantee the safety of research expeditioners.

With approval of a berth on a ship, there are then medical assessments and psychological suitability tests to be administered, and recruitment of expeditioners to be finalised by staff in the Corporate Branch.

Prior to departure, all expeditioners must undergo community, safety and survival training which is conducted by staff in the Operations Branch. Many undergo trade and technical training specific to their area of expertise as well as training as assistants in essential skills such as anaesthetics and nursing.



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*Top: The PCMEGA team at Mt Cresswell Base Camp and some of the hardware that made it happen. Above: Departure from Hobart on the Aurora Australis.*

Responsibility for managing operational support for the science program is assigned to Station, Field and Voyage Leaders who rely on trade and technical support expeditioners within their teams to carry out the work agreed in the planning stage.

By the time a scientist departs for a period of work in Antarctica or the sub-antarctic, numerous Head Office staff have played a part in some aspect of supporting their research program.

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