

# LOOKING TO AUSTRALIA'S ANTARCTIC FUTURE

*The Antarctic Futures Project will define Australia's role in Antarctica to 2020.*

How will Australia be involved in Antarctica in the future? The Australian Government Antarctic Division has embarked on a project to find out.

The Australian Antarctic programme is nearing its 60th year — one of the longest sustained programmes in Antarctica of any nation. The Australian Government Antarctic Division is almost as old. In that time we have seen some momentous changes, both within our organisation (*Australian Antarctic Magazine* 10), and our external operating environment — including adoption of the Antarctic Treaty and the Madrid Protocol.

2007 heralds an exciting new era for the Australian Antarctic programme. Australia's new intercontinental air link will radically change the way we do business in Antarctica and require us to adapt to new ways of working. The role of Antarctic science in understanding and monitoring global climate change is an increasing focus of our programme. At the same time, a global escalation in the price of oil is raising concerns about whether Antarctic programmes can be sustained at their current levels. In the long history of Australia in the Antarctic, these are landmark events. But what happens next?

To find out, the Australian Government Antarctic Division has embarked on an Antarctic Futures Project that will articulate top level objectives for Australia's engagement in Antarctica to 2020. The project will look beyond the Division's current scientific and operational planning; beyond the introduction and consolidation of the air transport system; beyond the life of the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre; and beyond the point at which some pundits say that 'peak oil' will have materialised.

But how can we plan ahead when there are so many uncertainties? While we will aim to define a preferred Australian Antarctic future, we have to recognise and account for the many factors beyond our control.

We can start with what we do know. For example, we know that the air link will increase our flexibility in planning and allow more people to participate in the Antarctic programme; interest in marine science research and climate change science will continue to grow; and there is increasing interest in and growing opportunities for international collaboration. We also know, in many cases, what people want to do in Antarctica — there is no shortage of proposals for more research projects on land, at sea and in the atmosphere.

The Australian Government Antarctic Division project team is consulting with current and potential future participants in the Antarctic programme. We are seeking the views of a wide range of federal and state government agencies that have an interest in Australia's place in Antarctica, or that may have a future interest — from a policy, science or operational perspective. And we are using previous reviews and analyses, such as the Antarctic Science Advisory Committee's Foresight Report and the 'bold new vision' being developed by Antarctic Division scientists.

When people and organisations provide their 'wish lists' of things to do in Antarctica, a fundamental question we will be asking is, 'why will we want to do this?' The answer will enable us to identify, understand and justify what future activities we should spend our money and effort on.

Given that the Australian Government Antarctic Division is the lead agency for advancing Australia's policy, science, environmental and operational interests in Antarctica, the outcomes of the project will also inform the future directions for the organisation. However, this is not an internal Division review. We are looking at Antarctica in terms of the range of national interests to be served. We will embrace the broad Government and Antarctic community aspirations, while accounting for the Division's current responsibility for pursuing the Australian Government's goals in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean.

The project will present an agreed '2020 vision' of Australia's engagement with Antarctica — providing context for short, medium and long term decision-making about Australia's approach to the Antarctic. This will allow for more confident strategic and operational planning within the Australian Antarctic programme and within the Antarctic Division, optimum use of Government resources, and an improved understanding of how our involvement in Antarctica matches with expectations.

Importantly, the project outcomes will help to protect future options — ensuring that the options for future generations will not be constrained by the decisions we make now.

ANDREW JACKSON  
*Antarctic Futures Project Manager*