Tasmania's Antarctic Connection: Past, Present and Future

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Presentations to this conference have looked at the past, present and future. I wish to briefly discuss Tasmania’s connection to the Antarctic in the context of this theme. Historically, Tasmania has been an important base for expeditions to Antarctica. Today, Hobart remains an important port for Antarctic bound vessels, and is home to several Antarctic-related organisations. And the future of our connection with our Antarctica is being planned through the State Government’s first comprehensive policy on the Tasmanian Antarctic, Sub-Antarctic and Southern Ocean.

Let me start with the past, because to understand where you are going, you need to understand where you have come from. Mind you, the early Antarctic explorers had little idea of where they going, or of the conditions they would face when they got there.

On 10 March 1773 Captain Cook, in his boat *Adventure* anchored off Adventure Bay on Bruny Island, south of Hobart, after making the first crossing of the Antarctic Circle. He then went on to make the first circumnavigation of Antarctica.

Cook’s voyage was repeated in 1831 by John Biscoe, who also stopped in Hobart, which was by then a bustling whaling port. Biscoe confirmed the existence of the Antarctic continent by claiming Enderby Land for the British.

Not to be outdone, the French sent Dumont d’Urville to Hobart, from where he sailed south in the *l’Astrolabe* and the *Zelee*, claiming La Terre Adelie for France in 1839. D’Urville mistakenly believed he had discovered the southern magnetic pole, but this feat was achieved two years later by James Clark Ross.

Ross was able to predict the magnetic pole with his Rossbank Magnetic Observatory, which he built in Hobart. He was unable to reach the magnetic pole, however, his way being blocked by the Ross Ice Shelf and the pole was inland at that time.

The first Australian to set foot on Antarctica was Tasmanian physicist Louis Bernacchi, who sailed from Hobart to Cape Adare on Carstens Borchgrevink’s 1898 expedition.
December 1911 saw Douglas Mawson leave Hobart to chart large sections of the Antarctic coast, also venturing several kilometres inland.

Just four months later, Roald Amundsen sailed in to Hobart to tell the world of his successful conquest of the South Pole. Amundsen excitedly cabled the news from the Hobart GPO.

In 1930 Mawson returned to Antarctica from Hobart. His explorations on this trip led to the establishment of the Australian Antarctic Territory in 1936.

The formation of the Australian Antarctic Research Expedition (ANARE) in 1947 saw Hobart become a key port for ANARE vessels en route to Antarctica.

ANARE vessels such as the *Aurora Australis*, *Icebird* (now *Polar Bird*), *Nella Dan*, *Thala Dan*, *Nanok* S, *Lady Franklin*, *HMS Stalwart*, *Polar Queen*, *l'Astrolabe*, and *Blue Fin* regularly resupplied in Hobart.

ANARE’s French research counterpart, the Institut Francais pour la Recherche et la Technologie Polaires (IFTRTP) has used Hobart as a resupply port for 35 years. The French resupply vessel, *l'Astrolabe*, is currently wintering at Hobart Princes Wharf.

Since 1981 a number of national and international Antarctic organisations have made their home in Hobart. The Australian Antarctic Division started the trend by moving its headquarters from Melbourne to Hobart. In 1982, the Secretariat of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) was established in Hobart. The 24 member nations of CCAMLR have since met annually in Hobart to discuss methods of conserving marine living resources south of the Antarctic convergence.

Tasmania’s strong research capabilities were a factor in the establishment of the Institute of Antarctic and Southern Ocean Studies (IASOS) by the University of Tasmania in 1988. The research focus of IASOS was then complemented by the establishment of the Antarctic Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) in 1991. The Antarctic CRC is collaborative body incorporating the Australian Antarctic Division, the Australian Geological Survey Organisation, the Bureau of Meteorology, the University of Tasmania and the CSIRO Marine Division. The focus of the CRC is on the role of Antarctica in global climate change. The CRC's current funding concludes in mid-2003 and a new bid for funding is being prepared. The State Government is supporting the bid for renewal of funding for the CRC.

In 1997, the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Program (COMNAP) transferred its headquarters from Washington DC to Hobart.
COMNAP is responsible for the logistics and operational issues associated with the national Antarctic programs of Antarctic Treaty members.

You can see that Tasmania, and Hobart in particular, has a very special relationship with Antarctica. Tasmania is recognised as the world’s leading centre for Antarctic research, science and logistics. Last year in excess of 25 Antarctic vessels, from seven different countries, visited the Port of Hobart, providing a significant economic stimulus to the local economy. In total, Antarctic business generates approximately $93 million for Tasmania every year. To support this important industry, the Tasmanian Government, private industry, education and research institutions, and the Hobart Ports Corporation have formed the Tasmanian Polar Network. The Tasmanian Polar Network has serviced Antarctic expedition from Australia, France, Italy, China, Russia, Japan and the USA. It has also serviced private and tourist vessels such as the Russian ship Kapitan Khlebnikov, which has become a familiar sight in the Derwent River.

So where to from here?

Tasmania’s relationship with the Antarctic is too precious to leave to chance. To make sure that this relationship stays an integral part of Tasmanian life, we have developed a comprehensive policy on the Tasmanian Antarctic, Sub Antarctic and Southern Ocean. The policy, which is now being finalised and will be released in the near future, has been developed through widespread consultation with the Tasmanian Antarctic community. The policy identifies nine priority areas. I will briefly outline some of the key points relating to each area.

- The first priority area is commercialisation – ensuring Tasmania gains the maximum commercial benefit from its Antarctic relationship. The Tasmanian Polar Network has been extremely successful, and acts as a model for Government/industry cooperation. The network will be given assistance and encouragement to expand. This expansion will hopefully be assisted by the establishment of an Antarctic air link in Hobart.

- The second priority area is logistics and provisioning. The State Government will sponsor research to assist in improving food storage, packaging and transport. We will also continue to investigate types and availability of shipping fuels in Hobart.

- The third area is fishing. The fishing industry is extremely important to Tasmania, and we will examine ways to increase
the number of fishing vessels utilising the Port of Hobart. The State Government also understands the need to manage our fisheries resources carefully to ensure their sustainability, and to protect bio-diversity and ecological balance in the Antarctic and the Southern Ocean. This Government does not support any activity that will result in increased fishing in the Macquarie Island region. We will investigate the establishment of a Fisheries Observers Training Program in Hobart, should industry deem it worthwhile.

- This leads me to the fourth priority area, conservation and environmental management. Tasmania has developed a high level of expertise in conservation and environmental management. We will identify these skills, and market them to the broader Antarctic community. We also intend to conduct further investigation into the issue of repatriation of waste from Antarctica, and its impact of Tasmania.

- In the field of tourism, the fifth priority area, we will develop a coordinated Promotion and Marketing Plan to promote the Tasmanian Antarctic connection to tourists in our key markets. We will also promote and the support the viable operation of the Antarctic Adventure tourism facility in Hobart’s Salamanca Place.

- In terms of Antarctic infrastructure, we will continue to work with industry and science to promote Hobart as a location for Antarctic related businesses and secretariats. We will provide further resources to Office of Antarctic Affairs to increase the level of support to Antarctic secretariats based in the State.

- The seventh priority area is education and training. We will work with the education sector and with industry to develop specialist Antarctic training courses. We will also continue to support the graduate scholarship through IASOS and the Antarctic CRC with a view to extending support to other areas. The successful graduate student for the first year of the IASOS/CRC scholarship was recently announced.

- In the eighth priority area, culture and heritage, we will investigate the opportunity to develop an internationally recognised Antarctic repository centre and central database of Antarctic collections in Tasmania.

- The ninth and final priority area is information sharing. In this regard, we will establish a forum for regular
communication between key Antarctic organisations located within the State. The State Government has been pursuing a series of partnership agreements in a variety of fields, with local Government, the education sector and with industry. We will include Antarctica, and the importance of Tasmania’s Antarctic relationship, in all future partnership agreements.

Our Antarctic policy is comprehensive. It addresses fundamental areas of the State’s involvement in Antarctica, the sub-Antarctic and the Southern Ocean. It reaffirms the Government’s commitment to Antarctica and allows for expansion on the current activities undertaken in the State. Tasmania does have a very special relationship with the Antarctic. It began with Captain Cook, it is evident today in our industries and institutions, and will continue to be a defining characteristic of our State in the future.