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Tuesday April 21 2020

Funding welcome for vital research, highlights need for a strategic approach to Antarctic science

Funding of \$20 million over three years for Antarctic and Southern Ocean research will support the University of Tasmania's important contribution to global climate science.

Minister for Education Dan Tehan announced the funding today as part of a \$56 million Australian Research Council Special Research Initiative in Excellence in Antarctic Science.

University of Tasmania Vice-Chancellor Professor Rufus Black welcomed the investment in the globally important research done from Tasmania but called for a more strategic approach in the future.

"Our long-term research focus is on the changes in the Antarctic and Southern Ocean, which have significant implications for the global climate system," he said.

"Our ongoing focus with partners Australian National University and University of New South Wales will enable the world to understand those changes, and the vital implications they have for the planet and its people.

"In collaboration with national and international partners, the work we do from Tasmania is critical to the Earth's future and to keeping Australia at the forefront of Antarctic and Southern Ocean research."

Today's announcement replaces funding which ended last year, and the Antarctic Gateway Partnership, which ended earlier this year.

The original Antarctic Gateway Partnership was designed to build on existing Antarctic polar research capability in Tasmania, consolidating the State's position as a global leader and gateway for Antarctic research, education and innovation.

Professor Black said: "The disappointing feature of today's announcement is that the new approach to funding Australia's Southern Ocean and Antarctic research has not resulted in the outcomes that were intended.

"The hope was for a funding scheme to support a clear, long-term scientific research agenda that was in the national and global interest, well-aligned with the

Australian Antarctic Division's growing capabilities, and that strengthened Tasmania as Australia's Antarctic gateway.

"What we have ended up with is a funding system that is uncoordinated, creates uncertainty, and fragments rather than strengthens Australia's Antarctic science capability. If we don't fix this, it risks undermining Tasmania as Australia's Antarctic gateway. With this funding lasting just three years we have a narrow window to put in place a better funding model."

Professor Black said Government support for Antarctic research in Tasmania had been strong and consistent, and the new approach to funding mechanisms risked undermining the very work that was being funded.

"Tasmania is recognised as a global hub for Antarctic science – a more strategic approach to funding would allow the collaborative scientific community in Hobart to carry out vital research with greater confidence and security," Professor Black said.

BACKGROUND

University of Tasmania scientists carry out world-leading Antarctic and Southern Ocean research in close collaboration with Hobart-based staff at the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) and CSIRO, as well as with research organisations nationally and overseas.

The Australian Government provides funding for this research through two major streams:

- \$50 million over 10 years through the Australian Antarctic Program Partnership (AAPP), which in 2019 succeeded the long-running Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems CRC (ACE CRC). Along with the University, AAD and CSIRO, the AAPP also brings together the Bureau of Meteorology, Geoscience Australia, the Tasmanian Government, and Australia's Integrated Marine Observing System (IMOS).
- The Special Research Initiative (SRI) announced today, which will provide \$20 million over three years through the Australian Research Council (ARC), replacing the ARC-funded Antarctic Gateway Partnership, which received \$32 million over the last five years.

MEDIA OPPORTUNITY: Professor Black will be available for interview about the SRI funding at 10.30 am this morning. To confirm arrangements, contact: Jason Purdie – 0455 838 945.

Information released by:

Communications Office, University of Tasmania
+61 3 6226 2124

Communications.Office@utas.edu.au

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