



Tasmanian Polar Network

9 December 2014

Science a mainstay for a working port

By John Brennan

This week's great news for Tasmania and the Southern Ocean and Antarctic sector is the successful completion of sea trials by the nation's new research vessel, the CSIRO-managed RV *Investigator*, the 94-metre ship that takes its name from Matthew Flinders' sloop used in the first circumnavigation of Australia.

Great news for a number of reasons. For a start, *Investigator* is the latest and most advanced marine research vessel and the new pinup for global ocean science.

With Hobart as her home port, *Investigator's* simple sky blue and green blaze and brilliant white superstructure will become a familiar sight as she goes about her business for Australian and international research. That covers everything from boosting our understanding of petroleum reserves in our extensive marine territory, climate science with the study of oceanic and atmospheric conditions, finding commercially important mineral resources and enhancing Australian food security in the marine environment.

Great news, too, because *Investigator* will be an immensely valuable feature among Tasmania's hub of marine science, education and resource management institutions – the University of Tasmania's Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies and Australian Maritime College, the Antarctic Climate & Ecosystems CRC, CSIRO, Southern Ocean Observing System and the Commission for Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources – and stand alongside the Australian Antarctic Division's *RV Aurora Australis*. Together, they will be the re-supply and research workhorses of the Southern Ocean, although *Investigator* will be elsewhere in Australian and international waters for much of the year.

This follows the announcement a month ago of the four-year, \$24 million Antarctic Gateway Partnership, a program of Southern ocean and Antarctic science involving our research agencies and that begins in earnest next year.

It is timely to remind ourselves that Tasmania draws much in economic and cultural terms from the relationship we have with Southern Ocean and Antarctic science. The sector is worth in excess \$187M a year as a direct spend and through the Marine National Facility CSIRO will contribute \$7-11 M annually to the Tasmanian economy. The French Antarctic Program works from Hobart, the prospects for an expanded Chinese operation from Hobart look good, and we will continue to be attractive to other international research vessels, such as the US ocean research ships *Falkor* and *Roger Revelle* that will call into Hobart in the next few weeks. Businesses, too, have built up around the port specialising in servicing shipping, and the research and fishing fleets.

It is essential for Tasmania to remain a hub of excellence for Antarctic and marine science, research and logistics services, and future commercial, planning and environmental outcomes will all gain from the scientific outputs.

That said, there are several threats on the horizon in this city which, if they come to fruition, will severely undermine the sector. The first involves diminishing budgets for science and logistics. If our endeavour for the sector is to be a top-notch winner and for Tasmania to gain socially and economically we have to invest. New assets such as *Investigator* and the scheduled icebreaker replacement for the *RV Aurora Australis* are appreciated by industry but they alone are not enough to gain what we seek.

It's very clear to the Tasmanian Polar Network that Australia's capacity to maintain an international lead, protect its sovereign risks in the Antarctic and become attractive as a collaborator with other nations (thereby stimulating the Tasmanian economy) is at risk because of the funding cuts and future budget constraints, which have been imposed over a number of years.

Perhaps the most important in terms of Hobart's future involves sound and sensible land use planning decisions in and around Hobart's working port, which has been integral to the city and southern Tasmania's development for more than 200 years.

With the redevelopment of the former Macquarie Point railyards now being discussed, together with the opportunity such an immensely valuable parcel of waterfront land presents, it will be essential that the future viability of the working port is not threatened by incompatible neighbouring development. Hobart's port is a rare asset, the city has grown up around it, and a balance needs to be struck between public amenity, commercial enterprises and the working port.

We can only hope that sensible and sound decisions are made when it comes to developing the railyards and that a long-term perspective supportive of a shipping and science mainstay is top of mind.

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