



**ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE
NO. 29 (CITY OF HOBART) SQUADRON
RECEPTION TO MARK THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF
OPERATION SOUTHERN DISCOVERY
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, THURSDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 2026**

It is a great privilege to welcome you this evening as we gather to mark ten years of Operation SOUTHERN DISCOVERY.

I will begin and acknowledge the Palawa people as the First Peoples of lutruwita/Tasmania and the Traditional Custodians of this land. For countless generations, they have cared for and nurtured this remarkable island, its landscapes, waterways and communities.

I pay my respects to Elders past and present and recognise the enduring contribution of Aboriginal Tasmanians to the cultural, social and spiritual life of our State.

I am pleased to welcome members of the Australian Defence Force, as well as representatives of the Department of Climate Change, Energy and Water, the Australian Antarctic Division, Government Agencies, local industry partners and expeditioners.

Operation SOUTHERN DISCOVERY is an enduring peacetime undertaking in support of the Australian Antarctic Division and the Australian Antarctic Program, reflecting national interests grounded in the region's scientific, environmental, strategic and economic importance.

It is worth pausing to consider the remarkable scope of this task.

The operation extends across nearly seven per cent of the world's surface, encompassing Antarctic locations, the Southern Ocean south of sixty degrees, the Australian exclusive economic zone, and the territory of Macquarie Island Heard Island and McDonald Island.¹

That such a vast and inhospitable domain can be supported at all is a credit to the professionalism of the men and women of the Royal Australian Navy, Australian Army, and Royal Australian Air Force. They have served on this operation since its establishment in July 2016, the ADF's contribution to the Australian Antarctic Program.

Each year, Royal Australian Air Force C-17A Globemaster III aircraft provide critical air logistics support to Wilkins Aerodrome, complemented by airdrop capability, while the Royal Australian Navy contributes hydrographic and meteorological expertise, and the Australian Army provides geospatial survey support.²

Since its inception, Operation SOUTHERN DISCOVERY has provided 69 ADF round trips, including 59 air land missions to Wilkins Aerodrome, 10 airdrops, 1168 passengers and some 1.5 million kilograms of cargo. To do all that it has entailed more than 520 flight hours.

How impressive is that!

In addition, trade support, ICT support, Uncrewed Aerial Systems support, Meteorologists, Navy Survey support, communications officers and ship offload teams have been the major contributions as well.

¹ <https://www.defence.gov.au/defence-activities/operations/domestic-operations/southern-discovery> accessed 31 Aug 26

² <https://cove.army.gov.au/article/kyr-antarctica-military> accessed 1 Sep 26

It bears emphasising, too, that this contribution is undertaken within a framework of profound international responsibility.

As Defence has consistently affirmed, the ADF's involvement in the Australian Antarctic Program remains entirely consistent with the Antarctic Treaty's prohibition of any military activity beyond the provision of personnel or equipment in support of scientific or other peaceful purposes.³

Antarctica is of immense scientific, environmental and strategic importance and Australia's presence is only possible through the dedication and collaboration of many organisations.

The Antarctic Program is focussed on the advancement of scientific knowledge, but it also supports our enduring national interests in the region.

So importantly, people are at the centre of all those outcomes.

ADF members, expeditioners, scientists, aviation personnel, mariners, logisticians, engineers, communications specialists and support staff all contribute the success of the mission. Thank you one and all.

As we reflect this evening on a decade during which the Australian Defence Force has stood as steadfast partner to Australia's scientific presence in the Antarctic through Operation SOUTHERN DISCOVERY, let us look forward to the missions yet to be flown, the research yet to be enabled, and the enduring partnership between 29 Squadron, the wider Australian Defence Force, and the Australian Antarctic Program.

What I am particularly pleased about has been to be informed that Hobart will continue to serve as the ADF mounting base for Operation SOUTHERN DISCOVERY.

So, once again thank you for your service and please enjoy the reception.

³ <https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/releases/2024-12-11/defence-set-summer-southern-discovery>
accessed 2 Sep 26