



**OPENING OF THE
2026 AUSTRALIAN ANTARCTIC FESTIVAL
ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
PRINCES WHARF 1, THURSDAY 20 AUGUST 2026**

Good afternoon, everyone.

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to Hobart, and to the Australian Antarctic Festival.

And what better place to celebrate Antarctica than here, just across the road from the remarkable replica of Mawson's Hut.

Thank you to Sinsa for that powerful Statement of Country. It was very moving. I also acknowledge and honour the enduring contribution of Aboriginal Tasmanians to the cultural, social and spiritual life of our State.

More than a century ago, Douglas Mawson and his expeditioners set out into one of the most extraordinary and unforgiving places on Earth. They took with them courage, curiosity and an extraordinary determination to understand a place that, at the time, was almost beyond human imagination.

Today, Tasmania's relationship with Antarctica has evolved, but it has never been more important than it is today.

Because Antarctica is not simply a place at the bottom of the world. It is one of the great systems that sustains life across our entire planet.

You could call it the world's most important air-conditioning unit.

What happens in Antarctica does not stay in Antarctica. Its ice, the Southern Ocean, its winds and currents all play a profound role in regulating our climate, our oceans and our weather.

And that is why Tasmania's relationship with Antarctica is about so much more than exploration. It is about our future.

From Hobart, scientists, researchers, expeditioners, engineers, doctors, mariners and businesses contribute to a global effort to understand and protect one of the most important regions on Earth.

Hobart is one of only five Antarctic gateway cities in the world and I would argue, one of **the** most important. We are home to extraordinary concentrations of Antarctic and Southern Ocean expertise, and we welcome nations from around the world as they journey south.

That makes Tasmania a small island with a remarkably large role to play.

We are geographically remote but deeply connected to the world. We are surrounded by wild places, but we are also a place of ideas, science, innovation and international collaboration.

That combination is part of who we are. And it is why Tasmania is such a natural home for this festival.

The Antarctic story is a Tasmanian story. It is a story of curiosity and courage. Of working with nature rather than against it. Of people from different nations coming together in pursuit of knowledge.

And increasingly, it is a story about responsibility — our responsibility to understand and protect a fragile and globally important environment.

The Australian Antarctic Festival gives us the chance to celebrate that connection — but also to look forward.

Earlier this week, I was reminded of the importance of looking forward when I hosted a reception for National Science Week. I had the privilege of meeting some remarkable young Tasmanians who are already thinking about the big questions facing our world. What struck me was their curiosity. Their willingness to ask questions. Their excitement about what might be possible. And their belief that they could play a part in shaping the future.

That is exactly what this festival is about. Over the next four days, Antarctica will come alive here on Hobart's waterfront.

You will be able to meet and talk one on one with Antarctic scientists and expeditioners, explore the Antarctic Expo, experience hands-on science, hear stories from the far south, and discover the creativity inspired by Antarctica. There are activities for families and young people, including Mawson's Family Day, where you can even meet working sled dogs, and don't forget the Antarctic Cities Passport, connecting Hobart with other gateway cities around the world.

That is something I particularly love about this event. It brings Antarctica to Tasmania, but it also takes Tasmania to the world.

When people come here to experience our Antarctic connection, they experience Tasmania. They see our waterfront, one of my favourite places. They discover our science and research. They meet our people. They taste our food and drink.

They experience our creativity and our hospitality.

And they see a place that is proud of its wild landscapes, but equally proud of the knowledge, innovation and ambition that come from them.

This is Tasmania at its best: connected to the world, confident in our place, and looking south towards one of the greatest challenges — and opportunities — of our time.

The Australian Antarctic Festival can inspire the next generation of scientists, explorers, engineers, artists, researchers and Antarctic leaders.

And perhaps, standing here close to Mawson's Hut, one of those young people will look south and imagine what their own contribution might be.

That is the power of festivals like this. They do more than celebrate our history. They help shape our future.

So today, let us celebrate the adventure of Antarctica.

Let us celebrate the extraordinary people who work there and support it from Tasmania — the scientists, expeditioners, businesses, researchers, volunteers, educators and families who keep this remarkable connection alive.

And let us celebrate Tasmania's place in a global endeavour that matters to every one of us. Because Antarctica may be at the bottom of the world, but our future is intimately connected to it.

I am delighted to declare the Australian Antarctic Festival officially open.

Thank you, and enjoy the festival.