



**RECEPTION TO MARK THE LAUNCH OF THE
2026-27 ANTARCTIC SEASON
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, WEDNESDAY 14 OCTOBER 2026**

VICE-REGAL SALUTE

Good evening, everyone, and welcome to Government House for this reception. It is a great pleasure to have you all here in Australia's Antarctic Gateway city of Hobart. This is a wonderful opportunity for representatives of all parts of the Antarctic sector to gather together, to celebrate the new season and to wish all who are involved in the season this year all the best.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Palawa people as the First Peoples of lutruwita/Tasmania and the Traditional Custodians of the land we're gathered on today.

For countless generations, they have cared for this island, its landscapes, its waterways and its communities, and I'm so grateful to be able to live here.

I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and to any Aboriginal people with us today. Your continuing contribution to the cultural, social and spiritual life of our State is deeply valued.

A few days ago, the Australian Antarctic Division published a set of answers to the questions it hears most often from people thinking about a season south.

Two of those questions made the headline: “How long will I be away?” and “Do I have to have my appendix out?”¹

I have been thinking a bit about those two questions since. The first is really about the people you leave behind. The second is about how far you will be from help. I will leave the medical answer to the doctors in the room, but I would suggest that almost everything we celebrate tonight exists to make those two questions easier to live with.

For the expeditioners here, the season is no longer an abstraction. *Nuyina*’s first task is the over-ice resupply, refuelling and changeover of personnel at Davis. The cargo for that voyage was due months ago, and I suspect a number of people in this room spent their winter chasing consignment forms and mail deadlines so that the people departing would have what they needed.² You will not be thanked often enough, so allow me to do it now.

This is also a season of building. At Davis, work begins this summer on a seawater intake system and a reverse osmosis plant for producing water.³ It is not the kind of project that makes the evening news. Nor I would point out, is running short of fresh water at an Antarctic station.

And it is a season of remarkable science.

In January, Australia’s purpose-built deep drill cut its first Antarctic ice core, and the Million-Year Ice Core project continues as a multi-year campaign extending through 2026–27 and beyond.⁴

¹ <https://www.antarctica.gov.au/news/2026/> “Frequently Asked Questions about working for the Australian Antarctic Program”, 21 September 2026

² <https://www.antarctica.gov.au/antarctic-operations/travel-and-logistics/shipping-and-air-schedules/2627/>

³ <https://www.antarctica.gov.au/antarctic-operations/airp/>

⁴ <https://www.antarctica.gov.au/news/2026/> “Australia’s deep drill cuts its first Antarctic ice core”, 7 January 2026

The ambition of that work is extraordinary. It depends, as all our science does, on a chef who keeps a field team fed, a mechanic who keeps a vehicle running at minus thirty, and a pilot who judges the weather correctly.

This year also marks a decade of Operation Southern Discovery, the partnership between the Antarctic program and the Australian Defence Force. We hosted a reception here to mark that anniversary only last month and that was a great opportunity to connect and meet people working and supporting Antarctica.

When researching the operation, I was amazed by the sheer size of the operational area. Operation Southern Discovery covers around 7 per cent of the world's surface and includes the Australian Exclusive Economic Zone of Macquarie Island, the territory of Heard and McDonald Islands, Antarctic locations and the Southern Ocean south of 60 degrees!⁵

There is one story from that decade I would like to share. In 2021, when sea ice prevented a full resupply of Mawson, Defence crews flew a 15-hour, 10,400-kilometre round trip from Perth to airdrop 23 pallets of essential supplies over winter.

What struck me was not the scale of the flight. It was that the air dispatchers tested the drop of every single box, so that if a parachute failed, the contents would survive and no environmental incident would result.⁶ That, I think, is the standard this community holds itself to: not merely getting it there but considering carefully what happens if something goes wrong.

To our local businesses, and to those who represent them in government, I would like to acknowledge your work. According to the most recent assessment, the Antarctic and Southern Ocean sector contributes more than

⁵ <https://www.defence.gov.au/defence-activities/operations/domestic-operations/southern-discovery>

⁶ <https://www.antarctica.gov.au/news/2026/more-than-big-planes-operation-southern-discovery-celebrates-a-decade-of-antarctic-collaboration/>

\$204 million a year to the Tasmanian economy and employs more than 1,200 people in the State.

The Tasmanian Polar Network and the Government's Antarctic Tasmania program both provide opportunities to contribute to Australia's Antarctic gateway.⁷ Your contribution is significant to our economy but also supports Australia's vital national interests in the region.

We are very proud of the fact that, of the five Antarctic gateway cities, Tasmania holds the greatest concentration of Antarctic and Southern Ocean scientists and institutions. Those figures are not abstract to the people in this room. They are the provedores who pack the fresh food, the engineers who service the ship, the freight handlers at the port and the airport, and the small firms that have quietly made cold-climate work their specialty.⁸

The commitment to a new Macquarie Wharf 6, with \$188 million in Commonwealth funding and a 30-year arrangement making it *Nuyina's* home port, was an important signal that Hobart's role as Australia's Antarctic gateway is secure.⁹

The work on the wharf has begun in earnest. It is visible from my study as I look over the harbour, and both I, and the sector, will follow its progress with great interest.

We are also marking, this year, fifty years of women's participation in the Australian Antarctic program. Half a century is not a long time. There are people alive today who remember when the answer to "Can I go?" depended

⁷ <https://www.premier.tas.gov.au/latest-news/2026/march/tasmanian-businesses-invited-to-grow-antarctic-and-southern-ocean-sector>

⁸ https://www.stategrowth.tas.gov.au/business/sectors/antarctic_and_southern_ocean

⁹ <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/future-australian-antarctic-program-tasmania-secured>

on who was asking. It is worth pausing on how much has changed, and on the women whose persistence changed it.¹⁰

Finally, a word to the families and friends. The Division itself acknowledges that separation can be difficult both for expeditioners and for those who stay at home. You carry a share of this season that rarely appears in any report. Thank you for lending us the people you love.

I wish everyone a safe and productive season and a safe return.

Now, please, enjoy the reception and the background music provided by Tasmania Youth Orchestra cellists, Hwee-Lin Yee, Daniel Lewincamp, Evan Holbrook, Kevin Liu and Max Nielsen.

¹⁰ <https://www.antarctica.gov.au/news/2026/> "Ice Breakers: celebrating 50 years of women in Antarctica", 15 January 2026