Preparation of a Comprehensive Environmental Evaluation for the proposed construction and operation of an aerodrome near Australia’s Davis research station

(the Davis Aerodrome Project)

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**Information Paper submitted by Australia**

Summary

The Australian Antarctic Division (AAD)[[1]](#footnote-1) is undertaking planning activities for a proposal to construct and operate a new aerodrome near Davis research station in the Vestfold Hills, East Antarctica (the Davis Aerodrome Project). The Davis Aerodrome Project would involve the construction of a 2.7 kilometre paved runway to support intercontinental flights to and from Hobart, Australia. The aerodrome would also support a range of intra-continental aviation activity.

The planning activities include progressing the environmental impact assessments and approvals that would be required for the Davis Aerodrome Project to proceed. The proposal will be subject to the highest level of environmental scrutiny, including through the preparation and circulation of a Comprehensive Environmental Evaluation (CEE) in accordance with the requirements of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty. Australia would be pleased to discuss the Davis Aerodrome Project and provide further information, including through planned online consultation sessions.

Background

The 2016 *Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan* includes a commitment to investigate year‑round air access between Australia and Antarctica[[2]](#footnote-2). In May 2018, the Australian Government announced its intention to construct a paved runway near Davis research station in the Vestfold Hills, East Antarctica, subject to environmental and other approvals[[3]](#footnote-3).

Australian Antarctic Program (AAP) activities include scientific research and the operation of associated research stations and transport logistics. The AAP is highly collaborative and Australia works closely with other national Antarctic programs to run joint scientific and logistic operations.

The AAP and other national Antarctic programs have increasingly used aviation capabilities to support their own and joint scientific and logistics operations. In 2007, Australia introduced intercontinental flights between Hobart, Australia, and the 3.5 kilometre ice runway at Wilkins Aerodrome, near Casey research station. This was the first intercontinental aviation link to East Antarctica and has proven an effective logistics pathway for the AAP and other national Antarctic programs operating in the area.

The Davis Aerodrome Project would provide a step up in the aviation capability available to the AAP and other national Antarctic programs that Australia works closely with in East Antarctica. It would provide year‑round access via a six hour flight from Hobart, creating new logistic support pathways and scientific opportunities for the AAP and other national Antarctic programs. Importantly, the ability to move people and supplies at any time of the year would also improve the emergency response capability for the area.

As with current arrangements at Wilkins Aerodrome, Australia would offer some available capacity on chartered aircraft for passengers and cargo to support ongoing collaborative arrangements with other national Antarctic programs.

About the Project

The Davis Aerodrome Project would involve construction of the first paved all-weather runway in Antarctica. Planning activities, including site investigations, have identified a preferred site (see Figure 1) and include the development of preliminary aerodrome designs. The proposal currently involves:

* Constructing a 2.7 kilometre long runway to support large aircraft making year-round flights between Hobart and Davis research station. It is currently envisaged that the runway would be constructed from approximately 12,000 ten-tonne pre-cast concrete pavers. However, the final design and construction methodology would be determined through a procurement process.
* Constructing a 4.6 kilometre road between Davis research station and the aerodrome site, and a new wharf to facilitate ship-to-shore movement of goods and materials.
* Constructing aerodrome infrastructure, including an arrival and departure hall, fuel farm, landing lights and tower, heliport hangar and an apron large enough to accommodate the type of aircraft required to safely fly between Hobart and the aerodrome as well as smaller aircraft used for intra-continental flights.
* Initial expansion and enabling works at Davis research station so that it can support a construction workforce of around 250 people at its peak.
* Logistics and supply chains, including shipping and managing equipment, materials and crew. Current estimates suggest approximately 70 return voyages using ice-class vessels would be required to transport the goods and materials.

If the proposal proceeds it is anticipated that the aerodrome would be operational from around 2040.

Mapa

Descripción generada automáticamente**Figure 1. Indicative site plan for proposed aerodrome and associated infrastructure. The proposed aerodrome site is approximately 4.5 km north-east of Davis research station in the Vestfold Hills, East Antarctica.**

Environmental impact assessment

Australia is committed to best practice environmental stewardship in Antarctica. As a fundamental consideration in planning for the Davis Aerodrome Project, Australia is committed to understanding and addressing the environmental impacts of the proposal to the highest standards.

The Davis Aerodrome Project is subject to environmental impact assessment under Australian legislation that implements the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, the *Antarctic Treaty (Environment Protection) Act 1980* (ATEP Act). Under the ATEP Act it has been determined that a Comprehensive Environmental Evaluation (CEE) will need to be prepared.

The proposal will also be assessed against the requirements of Australian national environmental legislation, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

A range of Antarctic environment subject matter experts are engaged to provide advice and input into the development of the Davis Aerodrome Project CEE.

The draft CEE will be circulated to Parties and the Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP) for comment, in accordance with the requirements of Annex I to the Environmental Protocol.

Further information

Australia is planning a series of online consultation sessions to provide further information about the Davis Aerodrome Project and will separately circulate details to CEP Members and Observers.

More details about the Davis Aerodrome Project are available on the Australian Antarctic Division website [www.antarctica.gov.au](http://www.antarctica.gov.au).

1. The Australian Antarctic Division of the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment is responsible for leading, coordinating and delivering the Australian Antarctic Program. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See [ATCM XXXIX/IP111](https://documents.ats.aq/ATCM39/ip/ATCM39_ip111_e.doc) *Australian Antarctic Strategy and Action Plan* (Australia) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See [ATCM XLII/IP089](https://documents.ats.aq/ATCM42/ip/ATCM42_ip089_e.doc) *Modernisation of Australia’s Antarctic Program* (Australia) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)