Diversity and inclusion in the Australian Antarctic program

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Summary

The Australian Government has a steadfast and ongoing commitment to be at the forefront of efforts to promote gender equality and social inclusion, in Australia, Antarctica, and in our international relations. Ensuring diversity and inclusion is centred in our policy development and decision making, strengthens our thinking and reflects Australia’s modern society.

Recalling priority item 13 in the ATCM’s Multi-Year Strategic Work Plan encouraging Parties to “address equality, diversity and inclusion issues, by promoting full participation of underrepresented groups in Antarctic science and operations activities across all Antarctic issues including science, operations, policy and law”, Australia provides this update on ongoing work to improve diversity and inclusion in the Australian Antarctic Program.

As the manager of the Australian Antarctic program (AAP) the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) of the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) is committed to increasing diversity and inclusion and ensuring that Australia’s Antarctic workforce in all locations, from employees to expeditioners feel safe, welcome and respected. AAD is committed to prioritising action, informed by research and evidence, and consistent with Australia’s commitment to safety, diversity and inclusion.

Background

The Australian Antarctic Division of DCCEEW has an important role to play in delivering world class science and stewardship of Antarctica. The Australian Antarctic workforce brings together people from a wide range of Australian and international organisations, located in head office, on Antarctic research stations, in the field, and on Australian Antarctic vessels. As with other Antarctic programs, our Antarctic workplaces are also personal, living and social places. Australia seeks to ensure that all employees and expeditioners are safe, welcome and respected, and free from any discrimination, and is committed to increasing diversity across all aspects of the AAP.

As advised in 2022, Professor Meredith Nash from the University of Tasmania was engaged to undertake research into barriers and challenges for women in the AAP.

Following the release of this research, a workplace culture consultant (Russell Performance Co.) was appointed by DCCEEW to advise and provide recommendations on organisational culture, and on enhancing existing integrity processes and systems. The [Russell Review](https://blizzline.antarctica.gov.au/site/assets/files/14014/an_independent_review_of_workplace_culture_and_change_at_the_aad.pdf) and [DCCEEW’s response plan](https://blizzline.antarctica.gov.au/site/assets/files/14014/department_response_to_the_russell_review.pdf) for implementing recommendations were published in early April 2023.

The Department is now focusing on implementing the Russell Review recommendations, and have committed to actions, which include:

* A new Respect and Equality Reform Council to guide and oversee changes
* Reinforcing the obligation to prevent unacceptable behaviour and workplace harm
* Creating a safe reporting culture, ensuring support and no adverse consequences
* Facilities to support “Independent Safe Space”
* Additional resources to provide advice, support and incident response
* Raising awareness of the nature and impacts of bullying, harassment and discrimination
* Training for all staff in unconscious bias and bystander obligations
* Training for all leaders to address unacceptable behaviour and provide support
* Breaking down barriers to progression based on gender or background
* Antarctic workplace facilities and equipment designed for safety, inclusion and respect
* International collaboration to prevent workplace harm in Antarctica.

Additionally, Australia is convening eGroup discussion on the development of a Code of Conduct for meetings of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), which will assist CCAMLR in enabling events at which everyone can participate in an inclusive, respectful and safe environment. The Code of Conduct (the Code) will identify behaviours expected from all attendees of CCAMLR events, define unacceptable behaviours, and specify actions to be taken if there are breaches, or allegations of breaches, of the Code. Australia looks forward to engaging with CCAMLR Members on the development of the Code ahead of CCAMLR-42.

In sharing this information with Parties, Australia aims to encourage the practice of respect, safety and non-discrimination across Antarctic national programs through encouraging reflection and openness in breaking biases and challenging behaviours that exclude or harm individuals.