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MEDIA RELEASE

A new snapshot of the local Antarctic sector shows that Tasmania is poised to benefit significantly over the next few years from federally-funded upgrades to research infrastructure.

However, local industry leaders are warning that a lack of accompanying funding commitments for scientific research in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean is threatening to undermine any potential gains.

The study, commissioned by the Tasmanian Polar Network, shows that polar science and logistics contributed more than \$180 million to the state's economic activity last financial year.

The report shows that, after adjusting for inflation, overall funding for the sector has remained stable since the last economic survey in 2011-12.

Chair of the Tasmanian Polar Network, Karen Rees, said projects like the Macquarie Island research station upgrade, the Hobart Airport runway extension and the replacement icebreaker will bring significant economic benefits for Tasmania.

"The Tasmanian Polar Network and other industry leaders are now calling on State Government to provide clear supportive direction to realise these economic opportunities. If local firms can win just a quarter of this expenditure, it will inject an additional \$10 million into the sector and into the state economy every year," said Ms Rees.

"We also have serious concerns that these infrastructure pledges have not been matched by commitments to fund scientists and scientific research."

"Research infrastructure is there to support the scientists, but without any funding certainty for science there is a dark cloud hanging over the sector," said Ms Rees.

"Funding for major scientific collaborations including the Antarctic Gateway Partnership and the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre is due to expire within the next two years."

The study, by University of Tasmania Economics Professor, Graeme Wells, also shows spending on wages in the sector has decreased significantly, despite a slight increase in overall full time equivalent positions.

Overall employment in the sector grew from 671 to 755 full time equivalents, overall wage expenditure fell from \$75.2 million to \$70.6million, without adjusting for inflation.

“We are seeing the loss of older, senior staff at Australian Antarctic Division and CSIRO through redundancy programs and the hiring of more early careers scientists on short term contracts,” said Ms Rees.

“A large number of those contracts are due to expire in the next couple of years, and we are facing a real danger of seeing our best scientific talent, nurtured here in Tasmania, being lured overseas.”

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