

Australian Antarctic Program

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

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Canberra ACT
19 November 2025

Dear President
Dear Mr Speaker

In accordance with the authority contained in the *Auditor-General Act 1997*, I have undertaken an independent performance audit in the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. The report is titled *Australian Antarctic Program*. Pursuant to Senate Standing Order 166 relating to the presentation of documents when the Senate is not sitting, I present the report of this audit to the Parliament.

Following its presentation and receipt, the report will be placed on the Australian National Audit Office's website — <http://www.anao.gov.au>.

Yours sincerely



Dr Caralee McLiesh PSM
Auditor-General

The Honourable the President of the Senate
The Honourable the Speaker of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

AUDITING FOR AUSTRALIA

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Audit snapshot

Auditor-General Report No.6 2025–26

Australian Antarctic Program



Why did we do this audit?

- ▶ Australia has strong and long-standing strategic and scientific interests in the Antarctic region. The Australian Antarctic Program (the program) encompasses Australia's activities in Antarctica, including scientific research and infrastructure works.
- ▶ The Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) in the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) manages the delivery of the program.
- ▶ This audit provides the Parliament with assurance on whether the department is effectively managing the delivery of the program to achieve program outcomes.



What did we find?

- ▶ The department is partly effective in managing the delivery of the program to achieve program outcomes.
- ▶ The program is supported by partly appropriate governance and strategic planning arrangements.
- ▶ The department is partly effective in managing the delivery of the program. Lack of a clear project management framework has led to varied and inconsistent arrangements being established for project-level oversight, risk management, reporting and evaluation.
- ▶ The department is largely effective in evaluating, monitoring and reporting on achievement of program outcomes.



Key facts

- ▶ The department's activities in Antarctica are guided by Australia's national interests as outlined in the 2016 Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan.
- ▶ The 2024–25 Season Plan outlined three key science and three key non-science deliverables for the season.



What did we recommend?

- ▶ There were eight recommendations to the department, aimed at improving: risk management; workforce planning; project management; and evaluation activities.
- ▶ The department agreed to all eight recommendations.

\$373 m

funding allocated to the Australian Antarctic Program in 2024–25.

5

voyages were undertaken in the 2024–25 season, including RSV *Nuyina's* first dedicated marine science voyage (Voyage 3).

436

expeditioners were contracted to deliver the activities in the 2024–25 season.

Summary and recommendations

Background

1. Antarctica covers over 13 million square kilometres and is the highest, driest, windiest and coldest continent in the world. Australia aims to exercise leadership and influence in the international forums for the governance and management of the Antarctic region. The Australian Antarctic Territory covers 5.8 million square kilometres and comprises 42 per cent of the total area of Antarctica.

2. Australia's activities in Antarctica, from scientific research through to logistics and infrastructure works, are coordinated through the Australian Antarctic Program (the program).¹ The Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) in the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) is responsible for managing the delivery of the program. The AAD is funded under the department's Outcome 3:

Antarctica: Advance Australia's environmental, scientific, strategic and economic interests in the Antarctic region by protecting, researching and administering in the region, including through international engagement.

3. The AAD's activities are guided by Australia's national interests in Antarctica as outlined in the 2016 Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan. Australia's national interests are to:

- maintain Antarctica's freedom from strategic and/or political confrontation;
- preserve our sovereignty over the Australian Antarctic Territory, including our sovereign rights over adjacent offshore areas;
- support a strong and effective Antarctic Treaty system;
- conduct world-class scientific research consistent with national priorities;
- protect the Antarctic environment, having regard to its special qualities and effects on our region;
- be informed about and able to influence developments in a region geographically proximate to Australia; and
- foster economic opportunities arising from Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, consistent with our Antarctic Treaty system obligations, including the ban on mining and oil drilling.

Rationale for undertaking the audit

4. Australia has strong and long-standing strategic and scientific interests in the Antarctic region. The March 2022–23 Federal Budget announced over \$800 million to strengthen Australia's presence in Antarctica. The 2023–24 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook and 2024–25 Federal Budget both provided additional funding to continue delivery of the program and to expand Australia's international scientific activities in the region.

1 Australian Antarctic Program, available from <https://www.antarctica.gov.au/> [accessed 15 July 2025].

5. The program is of parliamentary interest. In May 2024, the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee recommended that the ANAO conduct an audit into the effectiveness of the department's management of Australia's Antarctic presence.

6. This audit provides the Parliament with assurance on whether the department is effectively managing the delivery of the program to achieve program outcomes.

Audit objective and criteria

7. The objective of the audit was to assess whether the department is effectively managing the delivery of the program to achieve program outcomes.

8. To form a conclusion against the objective, the following high-level criteria were adopted:

- Is the Australian Antarctic Program supported by appropriate governance and strategic planning arrangements?
- Is the department effectively managing the delivery of the Australian Antarctic Program?
- Is the department effectively evaluating, monitoring and reporting on its activities to determine whether the desired outcomes of the Australian Antarctic Program are being achieved?

Conclusion

9. The department is partly effective in managing the delivery of the program to achieve program outcomes. While improvements in governance and planning have been made since 2023 through establishing new arrangements, there is a need to further strengthen oversight of risk management, long-term workforce planning, project delivery, and evaluation of activities to more clearly demonstrate the achievement of program outcomes.

10. The program is supported by partly appropriate governance and strategic planning arrangements. New governance and strategic planning arrangements were established in 2023 and 2024 to support the delivery of the program. Ongoing effort is required to embed these new arrangements into the AAD's operations given the high-risk operating environment. Greater clarity is needed to guide the AAD's risk management activities, including stronger oversight over the management of severe and fatal risks. Workforce planning is primarily focused on the short term rather than the long term. It is not integrated into broader planning arrangements. The department does not effectively monitor expeditioners' compliance with mandatory training.

11. The department is partly effective in managing the delivery of the program. A new season planning process was introduced in 2023 for the 2024–25 season. The three key science deliverables for the 2024–25 season were largely delivered in accordance with the season plan. However, lack of a clear project management framework has led to varied and inconsistent arrangements being established for project-level oversight, risk management, and reporting. There is a need for the department to improve planning for the AAD's capital projects and consider whether its systems are fit for purpose to enable effective tracking of the AAD's infrastructure and maintenance works. While appropriate arrangements are in place to monitor season activities, the role of After Activity Reviews has not been clearly established and there are no clear processes to evaluate the overall success of the season in achieving its objectives.

12. The department is largely effective in evaluating, monitoring and reporting on whether program outcomes are being achieved. The Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan (strategy and action plan) outlines the objectives and outcomes to be pursued through the program. Although the department undertakes five-yearly reviews of its progress in implementing the strategy and action plan, it has not established arrangements to monitor progress in between these reviews. The department established three performance measures relating to its activities in Antarctica and in 2024–25 reported that it had achieved the targets set for all three. It undertakes public and non-public reporting on the program and its progress in implementing the strategy and action plan, and a project is planned to further improve its performance reporting.

Supporting findings

Governance and strategic planning

13. New oversight arrangements were established in 2023 and 2024 to support the delivery of the program. These governance structures require ongoing effort to grow their maturity as they are embedded into the AAD's operations. Risk management activities are occurring, but they are not guided by a clear risk strategy tailored to the AAD's operational context, which heightens the likelihood that critical risks may not be properly identified, assessed, and mitigated. The AAD's severe and fatal risks are escalated and discussed in governance forums. However, there is a need for stronger oversight over these risks, including clearer articulation of risk controls and treatments, and informed acceptance of the risks by senior management, in order for the department to effectively demonstrate its compliance with WHS obligations. (See paragraphs 2.2 to 2.61)

14. New strategic planning arrangements were introduced in 2023 and 2024 to help deliver the priorities outlined in the strategy and action plan. These arrangements, once fully embedded, have the potential to improve the AAD's strategic planning to determine, document and operationalise program priorities. Development and finalisation of the implementation plan for the Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy and the infrastructure masterplans may help the AAD to more clearly articulate the science and non-science priorities for the Australian Antarctic Program and align them to its planned activities. (See paragraphs 2.62 to 2.94)

15. The AAD does not have appropriate workforce planning arrangements to support the delivery of the program. Its consideration of workforce needs is focused on immediate seasonal recruitment and allocation of tickets to expeditioners. Training is provided to expeditioners based on their role, station, departure date and mode of transport. Expeditioner compliance with mandatory training requirements is not effectively monitored, and the department has limited assurance over whether the expeditioners are working on tasks they are not adequately trained for. (See paragraphs 2.95 to 2.117)

2024–25 season delivery

16. A new season planning process was introduced in 2023 for the 2024–25 season. There is clear procedure and guidance to support the season planning process. Season planning is informed by consideration of risk, resources, logistics, and alignment to strategic priorities. The season planning process does not include a structured approach to incorporating lessons learned from previous seasons. Season risks rated 'severe' were not escalated in accordance with

requirements, reducing the effectiveness of risk management, oversight and decision-making. (See paragraphs 3.2 to 3.34)

17. Lack of a clear project management framework has led to varied and inconsistent arrangements being established for project-level planning, oversight, risk management, and reporting. A historical pattern of significant variations in capital budget indicates improved planning for capital projects is needed. Ongoing capital infrastructure works and maintenance activities are managed and tracked via the AAD's asset maintenance system, Maximo, which has issues with accuracy and completeness of information. There is an opportunity for the department to consider whether its systems are fit for purpose to enable effective planning, tracking and assurance over the delivery of its capital projects. (See paragraphs 3.35 to 3.93)

18. The arrangements in place to monitor and evaluate seasonal activities are mixed. There are appropriate arrangements to monitor seasonal activities. Arrangements are in place to evaluate some activities, but the role of After Activity Reviews has not been clearly established and the evaluation reports do not clearly articulate whether the desired objectives were achieved. Available reporting indicates that the Denman Marine Voyage and Denman Terrestrial Campaign took place as scheduled and supported all planned science projects. The Million Year Ice Core project was delayed but delivered the majority of planned activities. The department does not have an established process in place to evaluate the overall success of the season in achieving its objectives. (See paragraphs 3.94 to 3.112)

Evaluation, monitoring and reporting

19. The strategy and action plan outlines the objectives and outcomes to be pursued through the program. The department undertook a five-year review of the strategy and action plan in 2021 and has commenced planning for a ten-year review in 2026. The department does not monitor implementation of the commitments in the strategy and action plan in between the five-yearly reviews. (See paragraphs 4.2 to 4.17)

20. The department undertakes public and non-public reporting on the program and its progress in implementing the strategy and action plan. The department has three performance measures relating to its activities in Antarctica, which are compliant with the requirements of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014. It reported that in 2024–25 it achieved the targets set under each measure. The AAD is planning to undertake a project to improve its performance reporting and may benefit from considering whether it can better capture the breadth of its activities in Antarctica as described in its outcome. (See paragraphs 4.18 to 4.28)

Recommendations

Recommendation no. 1 Paragraph 2.32

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water implement a risk strategy and supporting resources for the AAD, outlining how its Enterprise Risk Management Framework should be operationalised and risks identified, escalated, and managed within the division's operational context.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water response: *Agreed.*

Recommendation no. 2 Paragraph 2.60

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, in managing the AAD's fatal risks, establish arrangements to ensure:

- (a) its safety standards and standard operating procedures are developed, reviewed and updated in a timely manner, to prevent risks of staff operating under unwritten or potentially outdated instructions;
- (b) it is clear what controls are in place for each fatal risk and how their efficacy was considered in self-assessments;
- (c) its governance bodies, in their reviews of the fatal risk register, clearly indicate whether any fatal risks require additional treatments, or have been discussed and accepted as being adequately controlled without the need for further treatments; and
- (d) these processes and decisions are clearly documented in accordance with the department's record-keeping and WHS obligations to demonstrate compliance and support accountability.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water response: *Agreed.*

Recommendation no. 3
Paragraph 2.92

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water more clearly align its planned activities with the government's key commitments, including by:

- (a) developing and finalising the implementation plan for the Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy, and the infrastructure masterplans, in a timely manner, to clearly articulate the science and non-science priorities for the Australian Antarctic Program; and
- (b) clearly documenting its rationale for focusing on certain campaigns and projects as priorities for the relevant seasons in reference to these key strategic documents.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water response: *Agreed.*

Recommendation no. 4
Paragraph 2.108

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water establish a workforce planning process for the AAD that considers both operational and long-term workforce requirements, linked to an assessment of risks and key capabilities needed to deliver on its objectives.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water response: *Agreed.*

Recommendation no. 5
Paragraph 2.116

To mitigate the risks arising from training non-compliance, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water implement arrangements to ensure that:

- (a) expeditioners complete their mandatory training prior to departure, with any exemptions and missed training accurately tracked and recorded; and
- (b) there are controls in place to verify and provide assurance that all expeditioners have completed the required training before they commence their duties.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water response: *Agreed.*

Recommendation no. 6
Paragraph 3.42

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water develop a project management framework for the AAD, outlining how projects and multi-project campaigns of different size and complexity should be classified, managed, delivered and reported on.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water response: *Agreed.*

Recommendation no. 7
Paragraph 3.103

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water establish an approach for the conduct of After Activity Reviews (AARs), including:

- (a) defining the types of activities or deliverables that are required to be evaluated, which should be commensurate with their importance to the delivery of the season;
- (b) outlining how and when to assess and document the achievement of outcomes or objectives of each activity or deliverable being evaluated;
- (c) determining how the AARs should inform whole-of-season evaluation; and
- (d) ensuring appropriate documentation of these arrangements as they are established.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water response: *Agreed.*

Recommendation no. 8
Paragraph 3.110

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water develop a process to: establish clear season objectives at the outset; evaluate the performance of completed seasons against those objectives; and capture and incorporate lessons learned in future planning.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water response: *Agreed.*

Summary of entity response

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) welcomes the Australian National Audit Office's audit report on the *Australian Antarctic Program* and acknowledges the findings of the audit.

The department agrees with all eight of the report's recommendations and notes that the recommendations build on improvements made by the department to the Program's administration over the last two years, particularly improvements in governance, expeditioner training, integrated planning, and monitoring and reporting on program outcomes.

The department is committed to ongoing improvement in delivery of the Australian Antarctic Program to ensure it continues to provide a strong platform that delivers on Australia's national interests in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, including our administration of the Australian Antarctic Territory, support for critical science, and demonstrating our commitment to and leadership in the Antarctic Treaty system.

Key messages from this audit for all Australian Government entities

21. Below is a summary of key messages, including instances of good practice, which have been identified in this audit and may be relevant for the operations of other Australian Government entities.

Policy/program implementation

- When delivering projects or activities of varying scale and complexity, it is good practice to implement fit-for-purpose governance and project management arrangements to ensure coherent approaches to project governance, risk management, reporting, and evaluation. These arrangements should be commensurate with the project's cost, importance and risk profile.

Performance and impact measurement

- Implementation of large, complex programs of work comprising activities at strategic, tactical and operational levels require clear articulation of desired outcomes or objectives at each level. Good practice is to ensure that a plan is in place to evaluate the achievement of these outcomes or objectives at both the micro and macro level, and plan for incorporating lessons into future program delivery to drive continual improvement.

Governance and risk management

- Standard enterprise-level frameworks and policies may not be suitable for program areas with specialist functions who operate in unusual or unique environments. Developing additional guidance outlining how to implement and operationalise these enterprise-level frameworks in their context could assist staff with more successful delivery.
- Management of severe risks with potentially catastrophic consequences requires a structured approach for escalation and reporting to senior management. This enables the relevant senior officials, including the accountable authority, to make informed decisions about risk management, including whether to accept the risks as sufficiently controlled, require further treatments, or even stop the activity from going ahead.

Audit findings

1. Background

Introduction

1.1 Antarctica covers over 13 million square kilometres and is the highest, driest, windiest and coldest continent in the world. Activities in Antarctica and surrounding seas are governed by four major international agreements which make up the Antarctic Treaty system:

- 1959 Antarctic Treaty;
- 1972 Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals;
- 1980 Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources; and
- 1991 Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (Madrid Protocol).

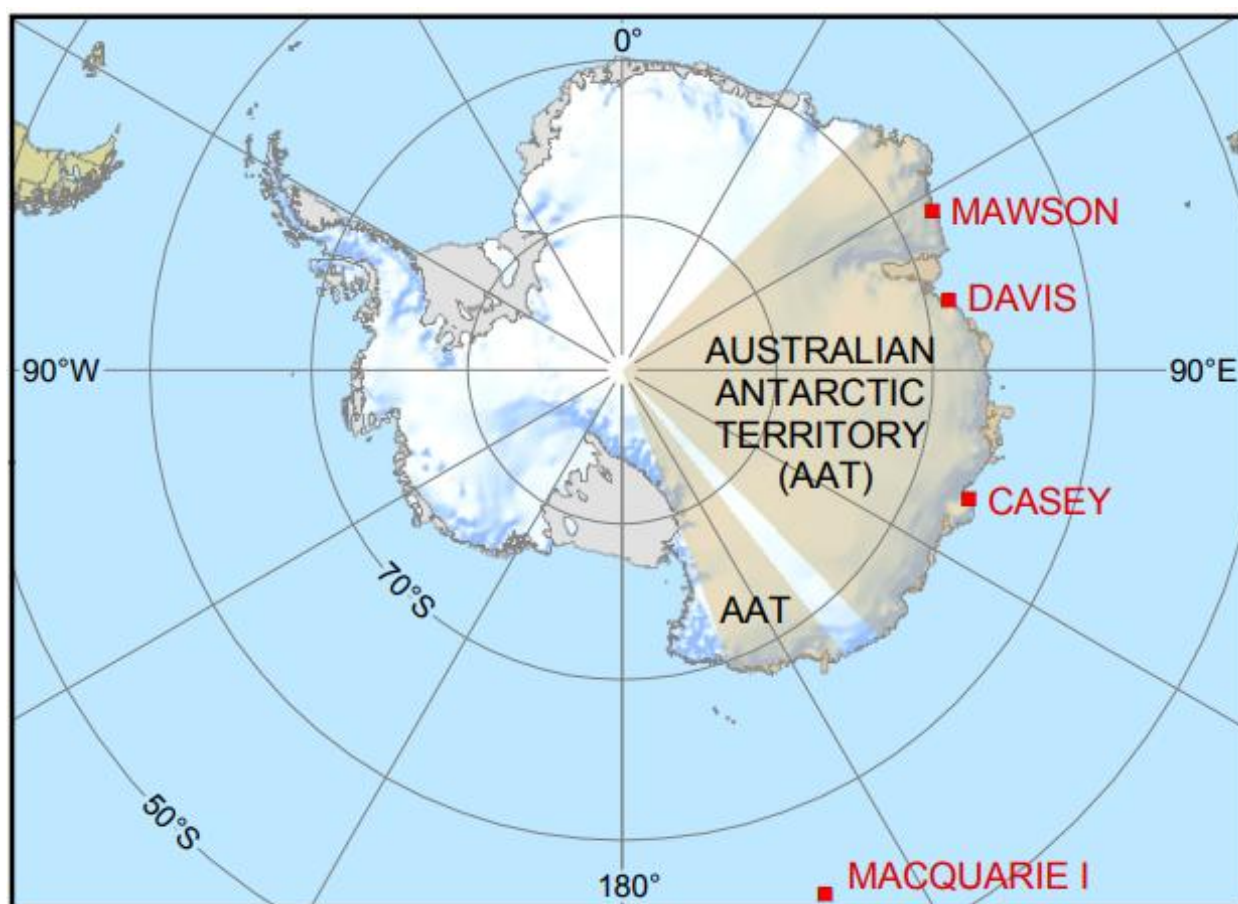
1.2 The 1959 Antarctic Treaty, which came into force in 1961, establishes that Antarctica should be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, in particular scientific research. The Madrid Protocol, adopted in 1991, designates Antarctica as ‘a natural reserve, devoted to peace and science’, bans mining, and articulates environmental protection responsibilities for signatories.²

Australia in Antarctica

1.3 Australia was one of the 12 original signatories to the Antarctic Treaty and aims to exercise leadership and influence in the international forums for the governance and management of the Antarctic region. The Australian Antarctic Territory covers 5.8 million square kilometres and comprises 42 per cent of the total area of Antarctica, which is nearly 80 per cent of the size of Australia (Figure 1.1).

2 Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, *The Antarctic Treaty*, available from <https://www.ats.aq/e/antarctictreaty.html> [accessed 15 July 2025].

Figure 1.1: Australian Antarctic Territory and permanent stations



Source: Australian Antarctic Data Centre.

Australian Antarctic Program

1.4 Australia's activities in Antarctica, from scientific research through to logistics and infrastructure works, are coordinated through the Australian Antarctic Program (the program).³ The Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) in the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) is responsible for managing the delivery of the program. The AAD's work in Antarctica is seasonal, with the bulk of its activities delivered during the summer operating season (October to April).

1.5 The activities of the AAD are funded under the department's Outcome 3:

Antarctica: Advance Australia's environmental, scientific, strategic and economic interests in the Antarctic region by protecting, researching and administering in the region, including through international engagement.

1.6 Administered and departmental funding allocated to Outcome 3 over the forward estimates is outlined in Table 1.1.

3 Australian Antarctic Program, available from <https://www.antarctica.gov.au/> [accessed 15 July 2025].

Table 1.1: Funding for Outcome 3 (\$'000)

Financial year	2024–25 Estimated actual	2025–26 Forward estimate	2026–27 Forward estimate	2027–28 Forward estimate	2028–29 Forward estimate
Total administered	5,012	5,012	5,012	5,012	5,012
Total departmental	368,091	387,185	357,252	367,144	374,450
Total	373,103	392,197	362,264	372,156	379,462

Source: 2025–26 Portfolio Budget Statements, p. 62.

1.7 The program is collaborative, with partnerships across government and more than 150 national and international research institutions. Australia also works with other countries' Antarctic programs to run joint international scientific and logistical operations, and to provide and receive assistance and support.⁴

Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan

1.8 Australia's national interests in Antarctica are outlined in the 2016 Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan (strategy and action plan), which was updated in 2022.⁵ Along with the department's Outcome 3, the national interests in the strategy and action plan outline the intended outcomes of the department's activities in Antarctica. Australia's national interests are to:

- maintain Antarctica's freedom from strategic and/or political confrontation;
- preserve our sovereignty over the Australian Antarctic Territory, including our sovereign rights over adjacent offshore areas;
- support a strong and effective Antarctic Treaty system;
- conduct world-class scientific research consistent with national priorities;
- protect the Antarctic environment, having regard to its special qualities and effects on our region;
- be informed about and able to influence developments in a region geographically proximate to Australia; and
- foster economic opportunities arising from Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, consistent with our Antarctic Treaty system obligations, including the ban on mining and oil drilling.

1.9 The 2016 strategy and action plan outlined program objectives and outcomes for year one, year two, year five and years 10 to 20. In the 2022 update, the strategy and action plan provided an overview of achievements for the first five years to 2021 and outlined the priorities and actions to focus on for the next five years to 2026.

Australian Antarctic Science Program

1.10 The Australian Antarctic Science Program operates within the Australian Antarctic Program 'to deliver world-class scientific research consistent with Australia's Antarctic science strategic

4 These agreements are managed via Quid Pro Quo (QPQ) arrangements with other nations and largely capitalise on unused capacity within an Antarctic operating season. Assistance and support can include expeditioner transport to Antarctica, medical evacuations, use of station resources and inland traverse.

5 Australian Antarctic Program, *Australian Antarctic Strategy*, available from <https://www.antarctica.gov.au/about-us/strategy-and-plans/antarctic-strategy/> [accessed 15 July 2025].

priorities'.⁶ Australia's Antarctic science strategic priorities were outlined in the April 2020 Australian Antarctic Science Strategic Plan, which was superseded by the Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy 2025–2035 (decadal strategy) in February 2025. The decadal strategy outlines the highest priority scientific outcomes to advance Australia's national interests in Antarctica and sub-Antarctic regions, and provides strategic guidance for the development of future research projects.

Previous audits and reviews

1.11 There have been two ANAO performance audits of the program.

- Auditor-General Report No. 22 2015–16 *Supporting the Australian Antarctic Program* concluded that mature policies and frameworks were in place to support the effective delivery of key program responsibilities, and noted that there was scope for the AAD to regularly review the effectiveness and appropriateness of policies, frameworks and administrative practices for the program.⁷
- Auditor-General Report No. 45 2016–17 *Replacement Antarctic Vessel* found that the procurement process for the Antarctic vessel was largely non-competitive, with an outcome that was higher than the cost benchmarks established by the department and significantly greater than chartering costs at the time, and therefore the department could not demonstrate its procurement provided value for money.⁸

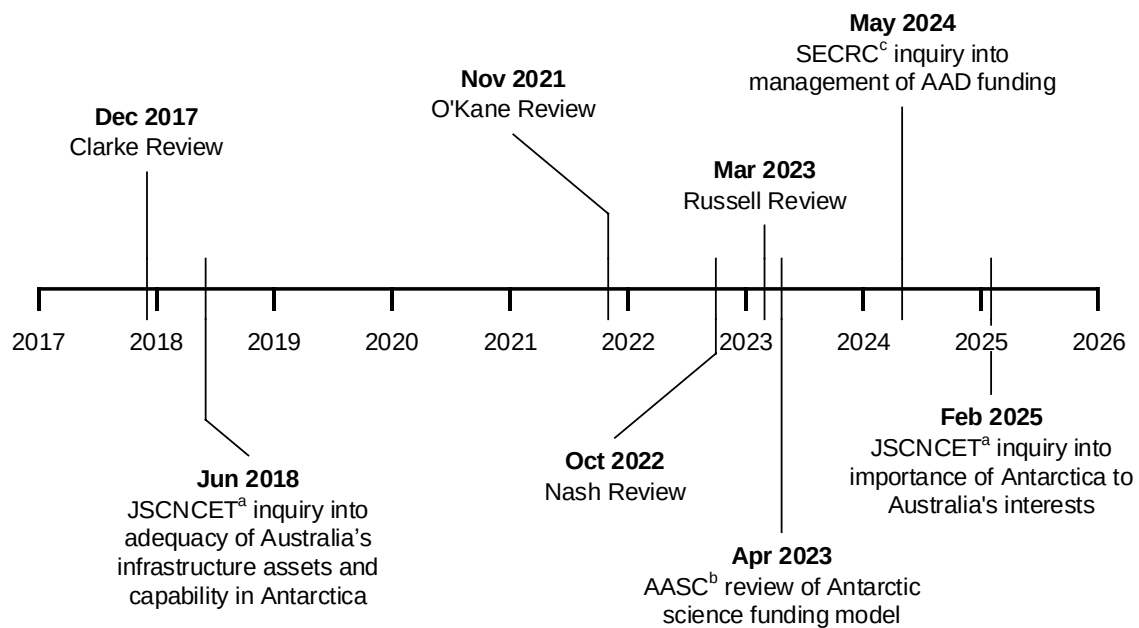
1.12 There have been eight other reviews and inquiries into the AAD and the program since 2017, which are summarised in Figure 1.2 and outlined in further detail in Appendix 3.

6 Australian Antarctic Program, *Australian Antarctic Science Program*, available from <https://www.antarctica.gov.au/science/information-for-scientists/> [accessed 15 July 2025].

7 Auditor-General Report No. 22 2015–16 *Supporting the Australian Antarctic Program*, ANAO, Canberra, 2016, available from <https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/supporting-australian-antarctic-program> [accessed 20 June 2025].

8 Auditor-General Report No. 45 2016–17 *Replacement Antarctic Vessel*, ANAO, Canberra, 2017, available from <https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/replacement-antarctic-vessel> [accessed 20 June 2025].

Figure 1.2: Timeline of key reviews and inquiries into Australian Antarctic Division and the program



Note a: JSCNCET refers to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories.

Note b: AASC refers to the Australian Antarctic Science Council.

Note c: SECRC refers to the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee.

Source: ANAO representation of key reviews and inquiries.

1.13 Key findings of the reviews have included: critical challenges in the AAD's governance and leadership; the impact and limitations of the current funding model; serious issues in workplace culture and the need to improve diversity, inclusion and staff wellbeing; and the need to prioritise and invest in impactful Antarctic science. The March 2023 Independent Review of Workplace Culture and Change at the Australian Antarctic Division (Russell Review) has in particular resulted in significant governance and leadership restructure at the AAD across 2023 and 2024, with much of its cultural reform efforts ongoing.⁹ The department has commenced a two-year review of progress in implementing the Russell Review's recommendations.

Rationale for undertaking the audit

1.14 Australia has strong and long-standing strategic and scientific interests in the Antarctic region. The March 2022–23 Federal Budget announced over \$800 million to strengthen Australia's presence in Antarctica. The 2023–24 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook and 2024–25 Federal Budget both provided additional funding to continue delivery of the program and to expand Australia's international scientific activities in the region.

⁹ The Russell Review, the department's response, and a 12-month implementation progress report are available on the department's website: Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, *Independent Review of Workplace Culture and Change at the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD)*, available from <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/about/publications/russell-review> [accessed 20 June 2025].

1.15 The program is of parliamentary interest. In May 2024, the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee recommended that the ANAO conduct an audit into the effectiveness of the department's management of Australia's Antarctic presence.

1.16 This audit provides the Parliament with assurance on whether the department is effectively managing the delivery of the program to achieve program outcomes.

Audit objective, criteria and scope

1.17 The objective of the audit was to assess whether the department is effectively managing the delivery of the program to achieve program outcomes.

1.18 To form a conclusion against the objective, the following high-level criteria were adopted:

- Is the Australian Antarctic Program supported by appropriate governance and strategic planning arrangements?
- Is the department effectively managing the delivery of the Australian Antarctic Program?
- Is the department effectively evaluating, monitoring and reporting on its activities to determine whether the desired outcomes of the Australian Antarctic Program are being achieved?

1.19 The audit did not examine: the department's engagement with international Antarctic forums, organisations and partnering nations; contract management for the icebreaker vessel *RSV Nuyina*; discharge of regulatory responsibilities in the Australian Antarctic Territory under the *Antarctic Treaty (Environment Protection) Act 1980* and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*; projects and activities from prior seasons, except if relevant to the 2024–25 season; and findings and recommendations from previous reviews of the AAD and the program, except to the extent relevant to the matters examined in the audit.

Audit methodology

1.20 The audit methodology included:

- examining entity documentation and data;
- examining the delivery of key projects in the 2024–25 Season Plan, including via tours of key facilities, walkthroughs, demonstrations, and examination of documentation; and
- meeting with departmental staff involved in planning or delivering the program, which included a visit to the AAD's head office in Tasmania.

1.21 The ANAO also received a submission via the citizen contribution facility on the ANAO website.

1.22 The audit was conducted in accordance with ANAO Auditing Standards at a cost to the ANAO of approximately \$439,725.

1.23 The team members for this audit were Se Eun Lee, Jade Ryan, Lorcan Stevens, Jacqueline Hedditch and Nathan Callaway.

2. Governance and strategic planning

Areas examined

This chapter examines whether the Australian Antarctic Program (the program) is supported by appropriate governance and strategic planning arrangements.

Conclusion

The program is supported by partly appropriate governance and strategic planning arrangements. New governance and strategic planning arrangements were established in 2023 and 2024 to support the delivery of the program. Ongoing effort is required to embed these new arrangements into the Australian Antarctic Division's (AAD's) operations given the high-risk operating environment. Greater clarity is needed to guide the AAD's risk management activities, including stronger oversight over the management of severe and fatal risks. Workforce planning is primarily focused on the short term rather than the long term. It is not integrated into broader planning arrangements. The department does not effectively monitor expeditioners' compliance with mandatory training.

Areas for improvement

The ANAO made five recommendations aimed at: implementing a risk strategy and supporting resources; improving the oversight and management of fatal risks; better alignment of its planned activities with the government's key commitments; establishing enhanced workforce planning; and strengthening assurance over mandatory training compliance.

2.1 The AAD is a division within the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department). The department, through the AAD, is responsible for leading, coordinating and delivering the program, which encompasses Australia's activities in Antarctica from scientific research through to logistics and infrastructure works.

Has the department established appropriate oversight arrangements to support the delivery of the program?

New oversight arrangements were established in 2023 and 2024 to support the delivery of the program. These governance structures require ongoing effort to grow their maturity as they are embedded into the AAD's operations. Risk management activities are occurring, but they are not guided by a clear risk strategy tailored to the AAD's operational context, which heightens the likelihood that critical risks may not be properly identified, assessed, and mitigated. The AAD's severe and fatal risks are escalated and discussed in governance forums. However, there is a need for stronger oversight over these risks, including clearer articulation of risk controls and treatments, and informed acceptance of the risks by senior management, in order for the department to effectively demonstrate its compliance with WHS obligations.

2.2 In October 2022, the department engaged consultants Russell Performance Co. to conduct an independent review into the AAD's workplace culture (the Russell Review). The Russell Review's final report was published in April 2023, making findings regarding the AAD's culture, capability and governance. In relation to leadership at the AAD, the Russell Review found:

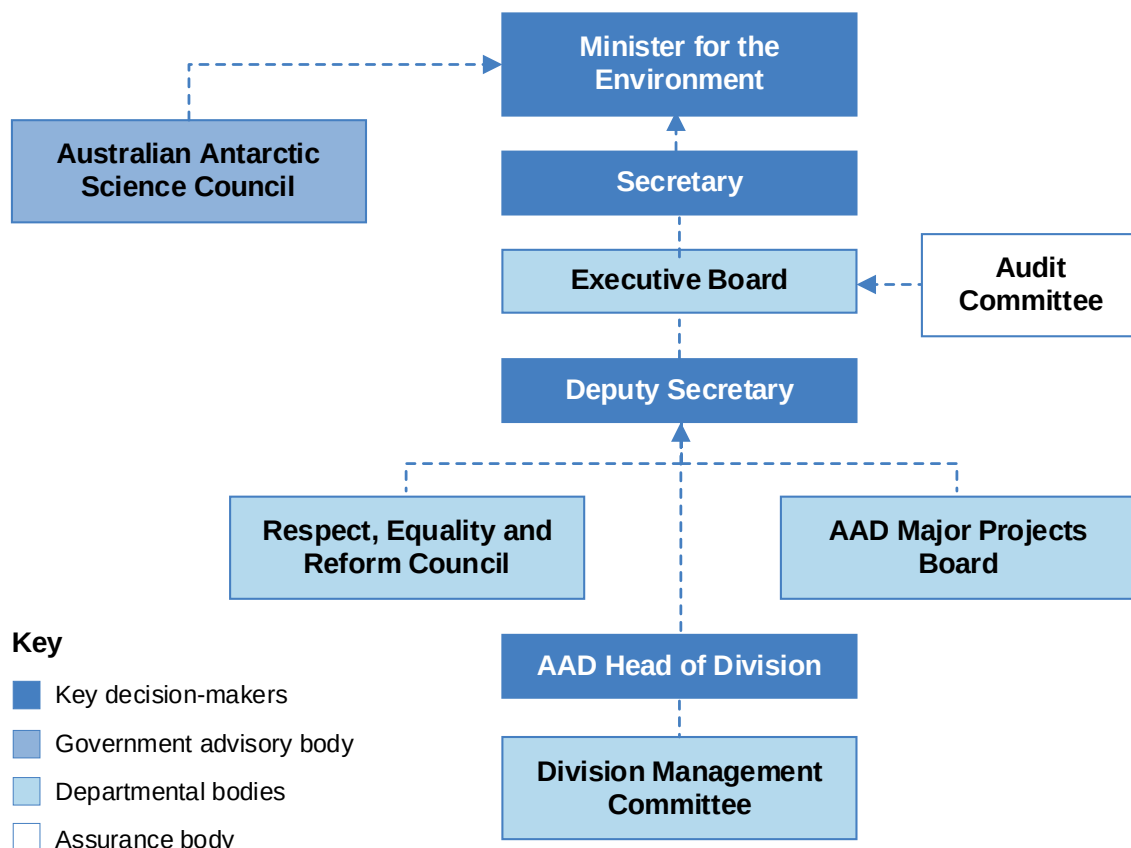
a significantly separated culture, siloed on a range of levels, and a leadership culture contributing to a troubling lack of psychological safety. ... A fresh leadership approach is needed to drive collaboration, communication, and connection between branches, Kingston and Antarctic work sites, the Division, and the broader Department to which it belongs.¹⁰

2.3 The Russell Review made 23 recommendations to the department under seven guiding principles. Principle 1 related to ‘Effective governance, oversight and monitoring to build a culture of respect and equality’, and made recommendations on:

developing strong and visible Division processes to accelerate cultural transformation, address staff concerns, and build trust among and between AAD people and the broader DCCEEW [the department]. This includes creating stronger lines of oversight and the opportunity to utilise external expertise to build diverse workplace culture in Australian and Antarctic workplaces.¹¹

2.4 New governance arrangements were established in the AAD in 2023 and 2024 to enact cultural change, improve oversight over program delivery, support the division’s capacity to provide input to the broader department, and respond to the Russell Review’s recommendations. Figure 2.1 illustrates the AAD’s governance structure as at October 2025.

Figure 2.1: Australian Antarctic Division governance structure



Source: Adapted by ANAO from the department’s records.

10 Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, *Independent Review of Workplace Culture and Change at the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD)*, pp. 24, 30.

11 *ibid.*, pp. 14, 67.

2.5 The Executive Board is responsible for the overall governance, management, policy leadership and strategic direction of the department. It comprises the Secretary and deputy secretaries, and is assisted by five governance sub-committees. The AAD Head of Division is responsible for overseeing the AAD's activities and reporting on divisional performance to the relevant deputy secretary and the department's Secretary.

2.6 The Audit Committee provides 'independent, objective assurance and consulting services designed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of [the department]'s operations'.

2.7 The Australian Antarctic Science Council was established in 2019 to advise the government on the Australian Antarctic Science Program (see paragraph 1.10). It is led by an independent chair appointed by the Minister for the Environment and Water, and comprises two independent members and ex-officio positions reserved for representatives from government and non-government (research) organisations.

2.8 The Respect, Equality and Reform Council was established in July 2023 to advise on and drive the implementation of cultural reform at the AAD, and to monitor the implementation of the department's response to the Russell Review.

2.9 The Major Projects Board (MPB) replaced the Program Management Board (PMB) in November 2024. The role and functions of the PMB, the MPB and the Division Management Committee (DMC) are examined below.

Program Management Board

2.10 The PMB met for the first time on 23 February 2023. According to its terms of reference, the PMB was to be 'responsible for approval of, and visibility and oversight of, major initiatives undertaken by the Division', and was to 'oversee progress of major initiatives in all areas of AAD activity'. Its membership comprised:

- Deputy Secretary responsible for the AAD (Chair);
- AAD Head of Division;
- AAD branch heads;
- the department's Chief Financial Officer;
- the department's Chief Operating Officer; and
- an independent member (external).¹²

2.11 The PMB met monthly until July 2023, and then quarterly until August 2024, when it was disbanded and replaced with the MPB (see paragraphs 2.13 to 2.17). The PMB received reports on: the AAD's budget; workplace health and safety (WHS); workforce planning; season planning and longer-term planning outlook; and governance reforms. The PMB also conducted 'deep dives' on key AAD initiatives, including the commissioning of the icebreaker vessel RSV *Nuyina*, projects being undertaken on Macquarie Island, and the Antarctic Infrastructure Renewal Program.¹³

12 Stret Pty Ltd was engaged to provide independent expertise and advice as a member of the PMB.

13 In 2019 the Australian Government announced a funding investment for the department to procure an alliance partner to upgrade the Antarctic research stations network and support infrastructure over 10 years. This project is being delivered under the Antarctic Infrastructure Renewal (AIR) Alliance.

2.12 At its eleventh meeting held on 29 August 2024, members' endorsement was sought for the closure of the PMB and the establishment of the MPB. The meeting paper noted that '[g]overnance arrangements within the Division have matured over the past year', and that the establishment of the DMC (in January 2024) had led to overlaps in agenda items, such as WHS and financial reporting. The members endorsed the closure of the PMB, with the majority of its functions transferred to the DMC, and the establishment of the MPB to oversee high-value, high-risk projects in the division. These changes were endorsed by the Secretary on 7 November 2024.

Major Projects Board

2.13 The MPB met for the first time on 6 November 2024. It meets four times per year and may hold additional meetings as needed. MPB membership comprises:

- Deputy Secretary responsible for the AAD (Chair);
- AAD Head of Division;
- the department's Chief Financial Officer;
- Parks Australia Chief Operations Officer; and
- an independent member with expertise in governance and major project delivery.¹⁴

2.14 The terms of reference state that the MPB's purpose is to:

[serve] as an advisory body to provide enhanced oversight and guidance for the delivery of the Australian Antarctic Division's (AAD) major projects and initiatives. It focuses on projects with significant strategic importance, complexity, budgetary implications, or risk profiles.

2.15 The MPB is intended to 'complement existing project governance structures without duplicating or interfering with day-to-day project management'. Under its terms of reference, the scope of its oversight extends to major projects and initiatives that meet the following criteria:

- An estimated investment of more than \$10 million.
- Designation as a Major Project by senior leadership.
- Additional oversight requirements due to complexity and risk profile.

2.16 The MPB terms of reference do not define a 'major project', or what level of complexity or risk profile would necessitate additional oversight requirements. There is no project management framework at the department or the AAD that provides guidance on these matters. Paragraphs 3.35 to 3.40 examine project management arrangements in further detail, and paragraphs 3.47 to 3.51 outline the inconsistent oversight arrangements established for the key deliverables for the 2024–25 season.

2.17 As at June 2025, the MPB is overseeing 13 major projects and initiatives, including the Macquarie Island Station Project, the Denman Marine Voyage, and the Million Year Ice Core project. These three projects are examined further in Chapter 3.

Division Management Committee

2.18 The department's response to the Russell Review stated that:

¹⁴ As for the PMB, Stret Pty Ltd was engaged as an independent member of the MPB.

A Planning Committee will be established and will agree an integrated planning outlook for all major activities, including for Antarctic summer seasons, across a three-year planning horizon. The Planning Committee will meet quarterly to track progress.

2.19 At a meeting held on 26 July 2023, the PMB considered a proposal for an uplift of the AAD's governance arrangements and structure, in order to 'support the Head of Division ... in their duties, and provide transparency, accountability and integrity in the Division's decision making and planning'. The draft AAD governance structure included a proposed Division Management Committee, 'which would replace the function of the former AAD Executive Committee and incorporate the proposed Planning Committee'.

2.20 The draft terms of reference and meeting schedule for the DMC were endorsed by the PMB at its eighth meeting held on 28 November 2023. On 18 December 2023, the Head of Division agreed to establish the DMC and hold the first meeting in January 2024.

2.21 The DMC agreed to its terms of reference at its first meeting held on 23 January 2024. The terms of reference state that the DMC:

is an SES-level forum for discussions on strategic priorities, opportunities for and barriers to the operation of the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) and the delivery of the Australian Antarctic Program.

2.22 Membership comprises the Head of Division as chair, the AAD Chief Scientist, AAD branch heads, and two Executive Level 2 members chosen on a rotational six-monthly basis. It is not a decision-making body and its role is to consider and provide advice to the Head of Division on strategic issues relevant to the delivery of AAD objectives.

2.23 The DMC meets monthly. Meeting records are complete, with agendas and papers prepared ahead of the meeting and meeting minutes and outcomes drafted following the meeting. The DMC receives updates on finance, WHS and division risks at each meeting, although its oversight and management of fatal risks require improvement (see paragraphs 2.50 to 2.59). Other key items of discussion at the DMC include: season planning; integrated planning; updates on key projects being delivered; and updates to divisional policies and procedures.

2.24 A number of issues arose during the establishment and transition of governance bodies, including in handover of action items (see paragraphs 3.31 to 3.32) and project oversight arrangements (see paragraph 3.50) between bodies. Further improvements to the AAD's governance arrangements are being made via a governance improvement plan, which was presented to the DMC at its 20 May 2025 meeting for endorsement. Key actions to be delivered to December 2025 include strengthening project management capability for major projects, strategic planning and corporate planning arrangements.

Risk management

Division risk framework

2.25 Prior to 2022, the AAD had in place the 2020–2021 AAD Risk Management Framework, AAD Risk Management Policy and AAD Risk Management Guidelines. These documents outlined: the roles and responsibilities for managing risk in the AAD; risk governance structure; risk appetite and tolerance; types of risk registers established to manage risks; risk reporting and monitoring; and when and how to undertake risk assessments and utilise the AAD's risk management tools.

2.26 In 2022, the department commenced consultation with its divisions, including the AAD, to review and develop its Enterprise Risk Management Framework (ERMF). The ERMF was approved and published in March 2023, and updated in September 2023. The ERMF outlines the department's approach to effective risk management and defines the departmental risk appetite and tolerance. Since its publication, the AAD has used the ERMF as 'the primary document referenced by the AAD when managing risk', and the division-specific risk documents were withdrawn.

2.27 The ERMF states that '[t]o support implementation of the framework, a business area may choose to develop supporting risk management policies, tools or guidance material'. These must 'comply and align with the framework's guiding principles, requirements and expectations for managing risks, and support implementation of the department's Risk Appetite and Tolerance Statements'.

2.28 The ERMF is supported by the Enterprise Risk Reference Guide (ERRG), which provides 'detailed guidance and information to assist staff in identifying and managing risk in their day-to-day work'. The ERRG states that business areas should develop a risk strategy '[w]here you have specific context or operating environment and need to define the scope, roles and reporting for risk management that do not follow generic guidance'. It states that '[a] risk strategy should clearly outline your business area's approach, expectations, prioritisation, and plan for managing risk in pursuit of your objectives'.

2.29 While the ERMF provides a high-level overview of departmental risk management processes, the AAD does not currently have a risk strategy that outlines its approach, expectations, priorities, or plan for managing risk. A range of risk management tools are in use across the AAD, including for undertaking hazardous work in Antarctica. However, there is no division-level guidance outlining how the relevant risk management tools should be used to ensure a consistent and coherent approach to managing risks in the division.

2.30 Considering the AAD's high risk profile, the lack of an appropriate risk management strategy and guidance impairs the ability of the department to assure itself that critical risks are properly identified, assessed and managed. This could increase the potential risks of safety incidents, operational disruptions, and failure to achieve program objectives.

2.31 On 16 May 2025, the MPB held a 'deep dive' into the AAD's approach to risk management, which included a discussion of a draft infographic developed to help staff to better understand the division's risk management processes. The infographic was finalised following the meeting and made available to staff via the AAD intranet on 19 June 2025. The AAD would benefit from developing a risk strategy to accompany the infographic and provide staff with guidance and support in undertaking risk management activities.

Recommendation no. 1

2.32 The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water implement a risk strategy and supporting resources for the AAD, outlining how its Enterprise Risk Management Framework should be operationalised and risks identified, escalated, and managed within the division's operational context.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water response: *Agreed.*

2.33 *The department proactively engages in risk management activities and risk practices for numerous projects and business as usual activities undertaken by the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD). This includes Job Hazards Analysis, incident investigations, crisis appreciation and scenario planning exercises, as well as regular review and oversight of divisional risks, Antarctic season operational risks, major project risks, WHS risks and fatal risks.*

2.34 *The department's Enterprise Risk Management Framework (ERMF) was developed in 2022. The AAD contributed to its development to ensure the unique operating needs of the AAD were considered in the whole of department fit-for-purpose approach to risk management. Since then, the AAD's risk management practices have been conducted consistent with the DCCEEW ERMF and guidance. We agree there is value in building on previous work to introduce a division-specific strategy that articulates how the ERMF is operationalised and risk management is undertaken in the AAD.*

Division risk oversight

2.35 The ERMF states that 'Business areas **must** record their risks using a risk register [emphasis in original]', which should inform risk reporting.

2.36 The AAD has established a division risk register, which is updated regularly. Updates ranged from minor wording amendments for clarification, to substantial changes to risk scope and introduction of new risks.

2.37 The DMC is responsible for considering and providing advice on division risks under its terms of reference, with branch heads leading the discussion on a specific division risk at each meeting. As at its July 2025 meeting, the DMC discussed division risks relating to: the achievement of the AAD's strategic objectives; WHS; reputation; internal governance, processes and systems; Antarctic infrastructure; impacts of climate change on AAD operations; the AAD workforce; and security of the AAD's information.

2.38 Review of DMC meeting records indicates that members consider the current risk sources, the effectiveness of current controls, and additional potential treatments to further mitigate the risks. The division risk register is updated to reflect the discussion.

2.39 For example, in relation to the risk relating to the AAD's internal governance, the relevant division risk was 'Failure of AAD governance framework and systems (to enable effective, transparent decision making and accountability)'. The DMC conducted a deep dive into this risk at its December 2024 meeting, at which the members acknowledged the progress made in establishing and understanding governance frameworks across the division over the past 12 to 18 months, and requested that the risk be refined to more accurately reflect the nature of the risk and provide a broader strategic perspective.

2.40 An update on the governance risk was provided at the DMC's May 2025 meeting, updating and refining the risk sources, consequences, controls and treatments. The DMC endorsed the revised risk assessment for the governance risk, subject to minor amendments to treatments and controls to ensure what was being proposed was achievable, not considered business as usual, and would have a demonstrable impact in reducing the overall risk rating.

2.41 The AAD facilitates regular risk assessment meetings to review individual division risks in preparation for the DMC's monthly risk discussions. The DMC also holds biannual risk workshops to review division risks holistically. In 2024, DMC risk workshops were held in May and December, where the division risks were considered against the department's enterprise risks, and changes to the division risk register were discussed and agreed. The first risk workshop of 2025 took place on 10 June, which included an overview of the AAD's risk management approaches.

Division risk escalation

2.42 The ERMF provides a risk communication and governance model, which states that risks rated 'severe' should be 'elevated to the Deputy Secretary immediately', with '[r]isk communication, management and mitigation to take precedence over all other activities'.

2.43 Across 2024 and 2025 (to March 2025), there were three division risks that had been rated as 'severe'¹⁵ at various points in time, either in their current or target risk rating:

- 'WHS physical incident';
- 'WHS psychosocial incident'; and
- 'Antarctic infrastructure is insufficient to support AAP objectives'.

2.44 These risks were escalated as required and discussed at the department's Risk Committee (sub-committee of the department's Executive Board) on 16 May 2024 and 25 February 2025. While the updates to the Risk Committee included an outline of efforts to mitigate the risks over the past 12 months, the records of the meetings did not clearly indicate whether: the mitigation efforts had been successful in reducing the risk ratings; the committee recommended any additional risk communication, management and mitigation activities to downgrade the risk ratings; or whether the Deputy Secretary, as the Senior Responsible Officer, had accepted the risks that were not able to be downgraded further.

Workplace health and safety risk management

2.45 One of the department's eight enterprise risks is:

4. We do not protect and enable our own and each other's health, safety and wellbeing and other people under our care.

2.46 Management of WHS risks is a key part of risk management at the AAD due to the nature of its operations.¹⁶ The AAD's monthly WHS reporting indicates that incidents of 'major' or

¹⁵ Risks are rated as: low; medium; high; and severe.

¹⁶ An internal 2023–24 WHS Management Review provided to the PMB in November 2023 noted that the AAD's workers compensation premiums constitute about 50 per cent of the annual cost of the workers compensation premium for the whole of the department.

‘catastrophic’ potential severity occur at an approximate average of four incidents per month.¹⁷ WHS risks also influence the AAD’s project and budget prioritisation, decisions on infrastructure investment, and recruitment and training processes.

2.47 Following a recommendation from a WHS management review in October 2023, a new ‘functional split’ of WHS responsibilities was agreed between the department’s central People Division and the AAD, which was endorsed by the DMC at its 20 May 2025 meeting.

- The People Division is responsible for: developing and maintaining the enterprise WHS management system; participating in reviews of the AAD’s WHS fatal risk register and monitoring the efficacy of their controls; and developing and monitoring safety improvement plans.
- The AAD is responsible for: developing and maintaining the divisional WHS management system; facilitating and monitoring the WHS fatal risk review process; and supporting the development of safety improvement plans in consultation with stakeholders.

Australian Antarctic Division workplace health and safety management system

2.48 The AAD intranet page on the WHS management system (as of 14 April 2025) refers users to the AAD Safety Management System Manual (SMS manual) for a ‘general description of AAD’s safety management system’, while noting that ‘[t]his document is currently subject to review and is incomplete’. The SMS manual indicates that:

- the AAD’s critical risks (including the risks in the Fatal Risk Register) are reviewed at least biannually and reported to the AAD executive with recommendations on priorities for improvement actions;
- operational and project-level risks should be managed in accordance with AAD Risk Management Policy and AAD Risk Management Guidelines (these documents were withdrawn in March 2023 — see paragraphs 2.25 to 2.26); and
- personal risks should be managed using risk management tools that are described in ‘AAD Safety Standard Personal Risk Management’ (this safety standard was not included in the list of safety standards in the appendix — see paragraph 2.52).

2.49 On 20 August 2025, the department engaged Endor Group Pty Ltd to provide technical expertise to assist with the revision of the AAD’s WHS documents. A project plan for the AAD WHS document uplift project has been developed, along with a schedule of documents for review. The project is planned to be completed by August 2027, subject to funding availability and extension of the contract.

Fatal risk management

2.50 Fatal risks are risks assessed as having the greatest potential to result in a workplace fatality. These risks are outlined in the AAD’s Fatal Risk Register, which is reviewed biannually by the AAD Fatal Risk Review Group. The outcomes of each review and the revised register are presented to the DMC, seeking endorsement of any changes to the fatal risk profile or the relative priority of planned mitigation works. In its February 2025 update, which was reviewed and endorsed by the

17 For example, an incident of major potential severity rating was a jet fuel spill at Macquarie Wharf, resulting in risk of fire and environmental damage. An incident of catastrophic potential severity rating was ‘unplanned ground movement’ of an airframe due to failure of a snow anchor during high winds, which had the potential to cause damage to the aircraft and subsequent reduced aviation capability.

DMC in April 2025, there were 38 fatal risk sources listed in the register, of which 14 were marked as 'high' priority for the AAD's attention 'for the purpose of planning risk mitigation works' (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Fatal risk sources with 'high' priority for the Australian Antarctic Division's attention, February 2025

AAD fatal risk sources		Worst credible single event outcome posed by risk source for AAD	Self-assessed adequacy of current controls at AAD
FR1	Foundering or major incident on a ship	100+ fatalities	Partially effective
FR2	Aviation (intra & intercontinental, and helicopter)	45+ fatalities	Partially effective
FR3	Station fire	25+ fatalities	Partially effective
FR4	Earthquake / Tsunami — Macquarie Island	20+ fatalities	Partially effective
FR5	Small watercraft — LARC and IRB/RIB ^a	15+ fatalities	Substantially effective
FR8	Hazardous substances and dangerous goods	2+ fatalities	Largely ineffective
FR9	Harm related to dynamic terrain (crevasses, tide cracks, unstable surfaces, etc.)	2+ fatalities	Substantially effective
FR13	Failures of fixed plant & buildings (critical infrastructure)	2+ fatalities	Substantially effective
FR14	Infectious and zoonotic disease	2+ fatalities	Partially effective
FR16	Habitable building collapse secondary to a landslip — Macquarie Island	2+ fatalities	Partially effective
FR17	Habitable building collapse secondary to a storm (high wind) event — Macquarie Island	2+ fatalities	Partially effective
FR22	Psychosocial harms (including suicide, workplace violence, substance misuse or abuse, excessive workloads, etc.)	Single fatality risk	Substantially effective
FR28	Asbestos exposure and other 'industrial' illness	Single fatality risk	Partially effective
FR33	Accidental or mismanaged detonation of explosives	Single fatality risk	Partially effective

Note a: LARCs (Lighter, Amphibious, Resupply, Cargo) and inflatable rubber boats (IRBs)/rigid inflatable boats (RIBs) are used for cargo and personnel transfers. They are also available for search and rescue.

Source: ANAO summary of AAD Fatal Risk Register, February 2025.

2.51 The Fatal Risk Register does not list the 'current controls' that are self-assessed for adequacy. Updates to the DMC do not list the controls that were considered in the self-assessment, or the criteria against which their efficacy was assessed. On 6 August 2025, the department advised the ANAO that 'risk controls are embedded in AAD Standard Operating Procedures [SOPs] and safety standards'.

2.52 The SMS manual provides a list of 'DCCEEW/AAD Safety Standards' in appendix 1. The department advised the ANAO on 6 August 2025 that this is 'a comprehensive list of documents that are currently in service and scheduled for development'. A total of 48 safety standards were listed. Half of the listed safety standards were marked as 'under development'.

2.53 On 28 July 2025, the department provided the ANAO with an update on its progress in developing the safety standards. Of the 24 that were under development:

- three had been developed and were advised to be 'current';
- nine were still to be developed;
- five were in draft or otherwise pending release;
- five were addressed by another standard or content (three by departmental standards; one via Safe Work Australia; and one referred to content on the AAD intranet); and
- no status updates were provided for two.

2.54 The AAD's intranet contains a page on WHS SOPs. There were a total of 42 SOPs linked across 12 sub-pages. The ANAO's examination of document review dates indicates that all but one SOP were out of date as at August 2025, and the validity of a further two were unknown (no date of review specified).

2.55 In July 2024, Atturra (formerly Noetic Solutions Pty Ltd) was engaged to: conduct a review of the AAD's WHS management system; and develop documents (such as standards, guidelines and procedures) to improve or fill gaps within the existing WHS management system.¹⁸

2.56 The desktop review was delivered on 27 November 2024, outlining key findings and recommendations relating to the AAD's WHS management system. On 28 July 2025, the department advised the ANAO that '[t]he contract with Atturra ended in February 2025 following delivery of Phase 1', and that 'Atturra was not engaged to deliver Phase 2 of the works'.¹⁹ As outlined in paragraph 2.49, the department has approached the market to seek expertise to assist with the revision of the AAD's WHS documents.

Safety improvement plan

2.57 The People Division, in collaboration with the AAD, develops an annual safety improvement plan (SIP) to address areas of deficiency 'deemed to pose the greatest risk to safety' and identified as priorities for improvement. The 2023–2025 SIP was approved by the Head of Division on 17 December 2023. The SIP outlined 35 'key initiatives' to be delivered. Of the 14 'high' priority fatal risk sources outlined in Table 2.1, 11 had an associated SIP initiative to improve their management.

2.58 It is not evident how the risks that are marked for 'high' priority for attention without a corresponding SIP initiative are being managed, including FR1 which has the highest potential fatality in a single event (100+), and FR2, which has the second highest (45+). While the DMC reviews and endorses the fatal risk register at relevant meetings, there is no clear indication of whether it has considered the need for additional treatments to mitigate any of the fatal risks,

18 AusTender, *Contract Notice View* — CN4086397, available from <https://www.tenders.gov.au/Cn/Show/e0057598-e0be-4d64-bcbc-80805e0fe2fe> [accessed 1 July 2025].

19 On 4 August 2025, the department advised the ANAO that the total expenditure under the contract with Atturra was \$52,525 (excluding GST), comprising the project start-up fee and the desktop review. The contract reported on AusTender was not amended to reflect the varied contract value.

especially those without a corresponding SIP initiative or with controls that were self-assessed as 'partially effective'.

2.59 An effective risk management process requires a clear and shared understanding of the risk controls in place and any additional treatments required, and informed acceptance of the final risk rating by senior management. This is critical for assurance that all reasonable steps are being taken to manage hazards that can credibly lead to one or more fatalities. The process should be underpinned by robust record-keeping practices to demonstrate the department's compliance with WHS obligations.²⁰

Recommendation no. 2

2.60 The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, in managing the AAD's fatal risks, establish arrangements to ensure:

- (a) its safety standards and standard operating procedures are developed, reviewed and updated in a timely manner, to prevent risks of staff operating under unwritten or potentially outdated instructions;
- (b) it is clear what controls are in place for each fatal risk and how their efficacy was considered in self-assessments;
- (c) its governance bodies, in their reviews of the fatal risk register, clearly indicate whether any fatal risks require additional treatments, or have been discussed and accepted as being adequately controlled without the need for further treatments; and
- (d) these processes and decisions are clearly documented in accordance with the department's record-keeping and WHS obligations to demonstrate compliance and support accountability.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water response: *Agreed.*

2.61 *Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of our staff, both expeditioners and head office staff, is of the utmost importance to the department. The AAD engages in WHS risk management across our operations. Controls are in place and enacted frequently to minimise risks to safety. These controls are documented in the numerous Standard Operating Procedures and Job Hazard Assessments provided for AAD activities. In recognition of the unique and challenging environment in which the Australian Antarctic Program is delivered, in March 2025 the department established a dedicated WHS team in the AAD to focus on the identification, assessment and mitigation of fatal risks. The department welcomes the ANAO's recommended improvements.*

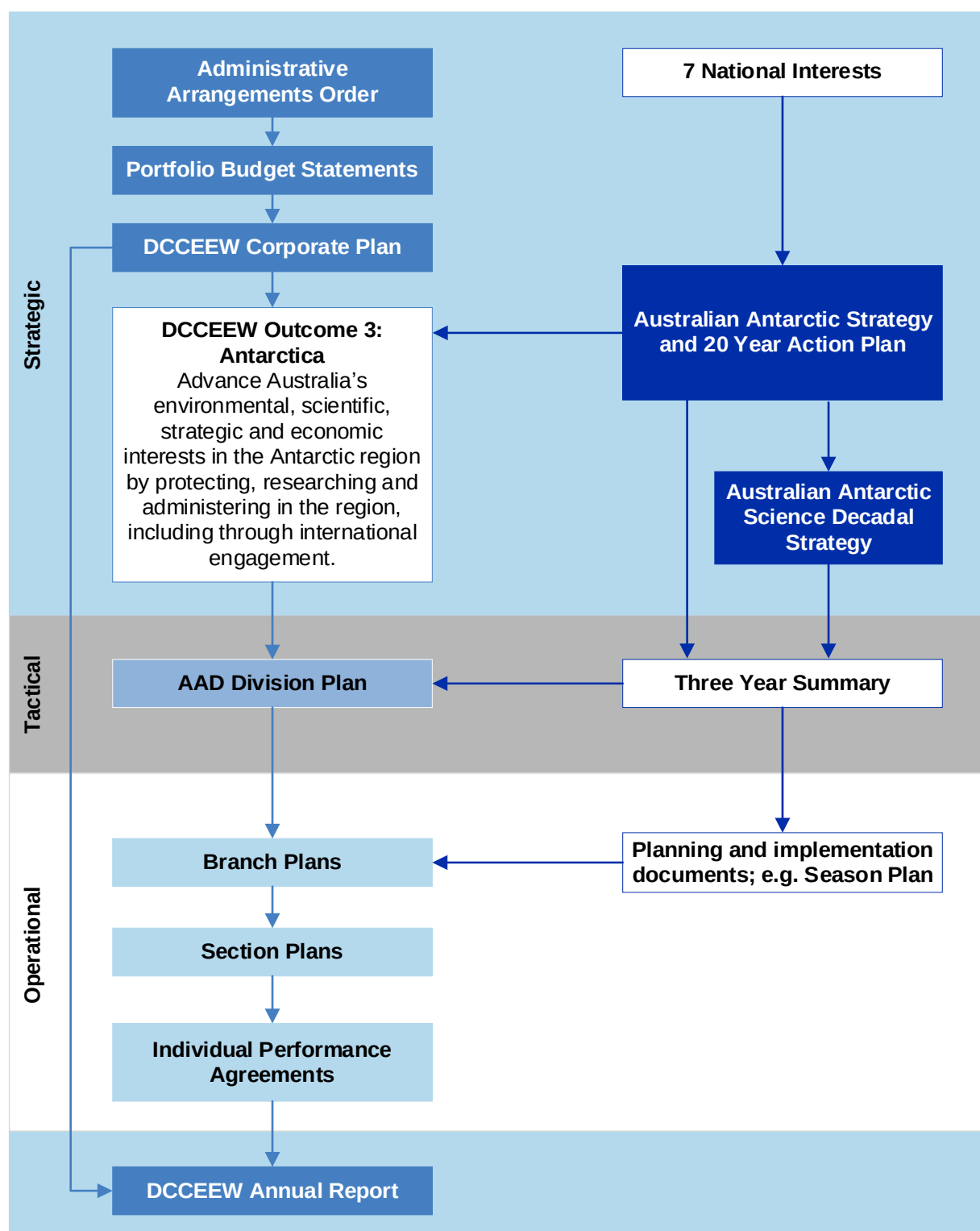
20 Safe Work Australia, *Model Code of Practice: How to manage work health and safety risks*, p. 28, available from <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/model-code-practice-how-manage-work-health-and-safety-risks> [accessed 16 June 2025].

Is the department undertaking appropriate strategic planning to determine program priorities?

New strategic planning arrangements were introduced in 2023 and 2024 to help deliver the priorities outlined in the strategy and action plan. These arrangements, once embedded, have the potential to improve the AAD's strategic planning to determine, document and operationalise program priorities. Development and finalisation of the implementation plan for the Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy and the infrastructure masterplans may help the AAD to more clearly articulate the science and non-science priorities for the Australian Antarctic Program and align them to its planned activities.

2.62 In December 2024, the Head of Division approved the AAD's 'strategic architecture', which 'provides a visual overview of the hierarchy and inter-relationship between the AAD's core strategic and planning documents as they relate at a strategic, operational, and tactical level'. It was updated in March 2025 and is represented at Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Australian Antarctic Division strategic architecture



Source: Adapted by the ANAO from the department's records.

Administrative Arrangements Order

2.63 The Administrative Arrangements Order (AAO) allocates executive responsibility among ministers. It sets out which matters and legislation are administered by which department or portfolio.

2.64 The AAO (13 May 2025) states that the department is responsible for ‘Administration of the Australian Antarctic Territory, and the Territory of Heard Island and McDonald Islands’.

Portfolio Budget Statements, corporate plan and annual report

2.65 There are three key accountability documents produced by entities under the Commonwealth performance framework established under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act):

- Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS) — the primary financial planning document;
- corporate plan — the primary non-financial planning document; and
- annual report — incorporates financial statements and annual performance statements that outline the financial and non-financial results achieved by entities.

2.66 The department’s functions relating to Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic region fall under its PBS Outcome 3, which specifies one key activity. The corporate plan specifies three performance measures under the key activity. Reporting against the performance measures is examined at paragraphs 4.18 to 4.22.

Division plan

2.67 According to departmental guidance, a division-level business plan is an important part of corporate planning (Figure 2.2). It helps identify challenges and risks specific to the relevant business area, and supports understanding of how the division’s work contributes to delivering the department’s broader outcomes.

2.68 In July 2023, the Executive Board agreed to an interim division planning and risk management approach to align with the release of the 2023–24 Corporate Plan, focusing on key priorities and risk registers. The AAD developed a division plan for 2023–24, which outlined four strategic priorities for the division, as well as cross-collaboration activities the division is contributing towards various departmental functions.

2.69 The AAD did not establish a division plan for 2024–25. On 8 May 2025, the department advised the ANAO that it:

did not require divisions to update division business plans in 2024–25. Instead, templates for the optional updating of Divisional Business Plans were provided to Heads of Divisions in December 2024. ...

The Department will release additional information on division level business planning to support implementation of the department’s 2025–26 Corporate Plan. ... AAD will update its Division Business Plan to meet the requirements of the broader department at that time.

2.70 The ANAO examined the department’s corporate planning process in Auditor-General Report No. 30 2023–24 *Corporate Planning in the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water*. The audit found that ‘Priorities identified in the corporate plan are not yet

reflected through a mature divisional planning process'.²¹ The absence of robust division planning arrangements for 2024–25 indicates that the department's divisional planning process requires further maturity.

Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan

2.71 The 2016 Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan (strategy and action plan) outlines seven national interests (see paragraph 1.8) and the actions the Australian Government will undertake from 2016 to 2036. The strategy and action plan was updated in 2022 following a five-year review of progress. Implementation tracking and reporting against the strategy and action plan are examined at paragraphs 4.4 to 4.8.

Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy

2.72 The 2022 update to the strategy and action plan committed to 'develop[ing] a ten-year Antarctic Science Plan ... to implement Australia's Antarctic strategic science priorities'.

2.73 The Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy (decadal strategy) was developed by the Australian Antarctic Science Council (see paragraph 2.7) and released on 28 February 2025. The decadal strategy 'reflects the highest priority scientific outcomes that advance Australia's national interests in Antarctica, the Southern Ocean and sub-Antarctic islands' as articulated in the strategy and action plan. It identifies three priority research themes for the next 10 years, comprising:

- climate system and change;
- biodiversity; and
- human impacts.

2.74 The department has not set a timeframe for the development of an implementation plan for the decadal strategy. On 10 October 2025, the department advised the ANAO that '[t]he timing and design of the implementation plan is being driven by the department in consultation with the Australian Antarctic Science Council'.

Infrastructure masterplans

2.75 The 2022 strategy and action plan included a commitment to '[d]eliver a comprehensive Masterplan for Antarctic stations to tackle ageing infrastructure' within five years. On 28 July 2025, the department advised the ANAO that the 'development of the masterplans is still in progress', with a number of key documents, including an interim design report, produced to date.

Three-year summary

2.76 As outlined at paragraph 2.18, the department's response to the Russell Review committed to developing an 'integrated planning outlook ... across a three-year planning horizon' for the AAD. Previously, the AAD operated under a five-year forward plan outlining the 'major actions and measures of success' across four delivery pillars and key enabling measures.

21 Auditor-General Report No. 30 2023–24 *Corporate Planning in the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water*, ANAO, Canberra, 2024, para 7, available from <https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/corporate-planning-the-department-climate-change-energy-the-environment-and-water> [accessed 16 June 2025].

2.77 In April 2023, a ‘cross-branch Integrated Planning Tiger-Team’ was established to advise and assist in developing a three-year plan. E3 Advisory Pty Ltd was engaged by the department to ‘deliver services in support of a sprint²² to develop a three-year plan for AAD’.²³ E3 Advisory’s work on the three-year planning process commenced on 26 April 2023, before the Order for Service was formally executed on 24 May 2023. The department advised the ANAO on 28 May 2025 that this had occurred due to the need to establish an ‘ethical wall’²⁴ to manage potential conflicts arising from E3 Advisory’s existing engagement with the department in relation to an infrastructure project in Antarctica, which had delayed the execution of the Order for Service. The department retroactively reported this as a breach in its procurement system on 17 July 2025, but the department advised the ANAO on 10 October 2025 that this action was later found to not be a breach of the department’s Accountable Authority Instructions or procurement policy, and withdrew the report.²⁵

2.78 The purpose of the sprint was to develop a three-year plan for the AAD that: was aligned to the division’s budget allocation, resources and logistics capability; and delivered on government commitments. The aim was to deliver the three-year plan ‘in final draft form to the Minister for the Environment and Water by the first week of June 2023, to commence on 1 July 2023’.

2.79 Updates on the sprint were provided to the PMB at its meetings in May and June 2023. The PMB was informed that the division’s activities identified through the sprint ‘are very likely to exceed budget and [Full-Time Equivalent (FTE)] in 2023–24 and beyond’, and that ‘[s]ome activities will need to be ceased and others reprioritised for later years’.

2.80 A final draft of the three-year plan was due by the first week of June 2023. The PMB meeting minutes of 26 June 2023 did not mention the missed deadline or a revised timeframe for its completion.

2.81 The three-year plan underwent multiple drafts throughout the remainder of 2023 and across 2024. The final draft document was provided to the minister for noting on 10 December 2024, with the minister signing the accompanying brief on 23 December 2024. In the brief, the department advised the minister that:

The Antarctic program remains oversubscribed — in part due to challenges presented by the COVID19 pandemic and poor governance and planning within the Australian Antarctic Division over many years (highlighted in the Russell Review). Promises have been made in isolation without due consideration of deliverability of interdependencies.

22 The term ‘sprint’ is from the Agile project management methodology. According to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet’s ‘Agile policy playbook’, sprints are used to divide the work over a set duration for goals and tasks to be achieved.

23 AusTender, *Contract Notice View* — CN3968790, available from <https://www.tenders.gov.au/Cn/Show/bca4b1a5-2b18-4daa-945f-c73401d138fc> [accessed 1 July 2025].

24 An ethical wall is a structured information barrier that prevents the flow of restricted information between one group and another.

25 While the department determined that commencing work without a contract was not a breach of its Accountable Authority Instructions or the procurement policy, an entity takes on increased risk when it permits work to commence prior to a contract being signed, such as if there is a dispute about what was agreed.

In spite of the investment made by the government (over \$1.3 billion in the Antarctic program since 2022), we are unlikely to achieve all of the specific actions committed to in the 2022 Update to the Strategy and Action plan.

2.82 On 24 December 2024, the Head of Division sent out an all-staff email formally announcing the endorsement of the document, which was titled ‘Three Year Summary to June 2026’ (three-year summary).²⁶ The three-year summary outlines a list of commitments to be delivered to June 2026 under six focus areas (see paragraph 2.89). It is to be updated annually, with its first update scheduled in December 2025. The annual update to the three-year summary, identifying and confirming the division’s strategic priorities, leads into the integrated planning process for upcoming seasons.

Integrated planning process

2.83 On 25 May 2023, the department engaged UBH Group for ‘Operational Augmentation Support to the Australian Antarctic Division’.²⁷ UBH’s initial scope of work related to ‘operations planning process’, which became the ‘Season Operations Planning Process (SOPP)’. The SOPP is examined at paragraphs 3.2 to 3.25.

2.84 The UBH contract underwent five change orders. Change Order 2 (April 2024) added a new stream of work on ‘Strategic Planning Reform’. Change Order 7²⁸ (September 2024) extended UBH’s support services ‘until completion in early 2025’ and amended the stream ‘Strategic Planning Reform’ to ‘Integrated Planning Process (IPP) Design & Implementation’.

2.85 The UBH contract and its amendments were not accurately reported on AusTender in accordance with the requirements in the Commonwealth Procurement Rules.²⁹ On 23 June 2025, the department advised the ANAO that the reporting error ‘may have been a consequence of an error during bulk data migration from a former department’s financial management system’.

2.86 The IPP project commenced in March 2024. Following stakeholder engagement in April 2024, UBH Group produced a design model of the IPP in July 2024, which was provided to the DMC for discussion at its 24 August 2024 meeting (Figure 2.3).

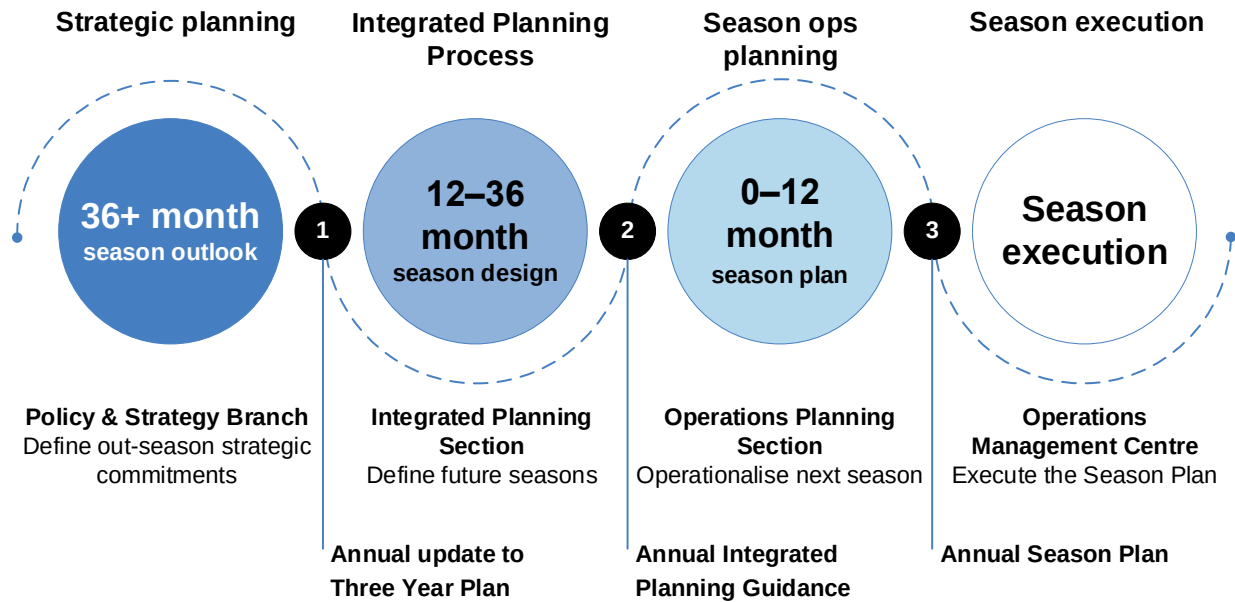
26 The three-year summary is available on the AAD website: Australian Antarctic Program, *Australian Antarctic Strategy*, available from <https://www.antarctica.gov.au/about-us/strategy-and-plans/antarctic-strategy/> [accessed 20 June 2025].

27 AusTender, *Contract Notice View* — CN3972973, available from <https://www.tenders.gov.au/Cn/Show/ab81df1b-4d8b-4909-bceb-de0d8077f2b9> [accessed 26 June 2025].

28 The department advised the ANAO on 14 March 2025 that Change Orders 3 and 4 were withdrawn as the specific budget allocations had not been approved. These were replaced by Change Orders 6 and 7.

29 Paragraphs 7.18 and 7.19 of the Commonwealth Procurement Rules state that contracts and amendments valued at or above \$10,000 must be reported on AusTender within 42 days. The original contract, which had a total value of \$3,759,648, was reported with a value of \$2,619,451.77, which was amended to \$2,616,848.39. None of its five change orders were reported as amendments to the contract, except for one which was reported as a separate contract: AusTender, *Contract Notice View* — CN4103022, available from <https://www.tenders.gov.au/Cn/Show/ac0ce1a7-e7d5-4ce0-8816-9f1e0398787b> [accessed 26 June 2025].

Figure 2.3: Integrated planning model



Source: Adapted by ANAO from the department's records.

2.87 In September 2024, as the three-year plan (which would initiate the IPP) was still being developed, a document outlining AAD strategic commitments for the 2025–26 season was issued by the Head of Division to inform the first IPP. On 25 March 2025, pending the first annual update to the three-year summary, a document outlining strategic commitments for the 2026–27 season and indicative strategic commitments for the 2027–28 season were approved by the Head of Division to initiate the next IPP.

2.88 The department advised the ANAO on 28 May 2025 that the intention is for the three-year summary — which is currently to June 2026 — to be updated in December 2025 to realign with and inform the next IPP.

Alignment of key strategic documents

2.89 The three-year summary outlines six focus areas to prioritise the delivery of Australia’s commitments in the strategy and action plan. These focus areas align with the high-level priorities outlined in the 2022 update to the strategy and action plan (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Alignment between strategy and action plan and three-year summary

Strategy and action plan priorities 2022–2026	Focus areas in Three Year Summary to June 2026 ^a
Leadership in Antarctica	Maintaining and enhancing Australia’s leadership and influence within the Antarctic Treaty system, and positioning Australia as a partner of choice in East Antarctica
Leadership and excellence in Antarctic science	Conducting robust, excellent science for and in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean
Leadership in environmental stewardship	Protecting and conserving the environment and repairing and managing Antarctica for future generations

Strategy and action plan priorities 2022–2026	Focus areas in Three Year Summary to June 2026 ^a
Develop economic, educational and collaborative opportunities	Securing our operations in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean ^b

Note a: The other two focus areas in the three-year summary relate to internal matters: 'Looking after our people, our greatest asset'; and 'Delivering on our Australian Public Service responsibilities and obligations'.

Note b: Commitments under this focus area include: completing and developing RSV *Nuyina*'s science systems to enhance science and marine science voyage capabilities; working with the Tasmanian Government to progress a long-term solution for refuelling and berthing for the RSV *Nuyina*; developing a comprehensive masterplan for the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic research stations to inform future infrastructure works; and undertaking infrastructure upgrades to enhance expeditioner wellbeing and provide a reliable, adaptive platform for future science.

Source: ANAO analysis of alignment between documents.

2.90 Noting that the IPP is relatively new and still maturing, the alignment of the strategic commitments identified for the IPP with other strategic planning documents could be improved. For example, the documents outlining the AAD's strategic commitments (see paragraph 2.87) identified the key priorities 'critical to achieving our strategic goals and effectively directing resources'. This included, for instance, the delivery of major infrastructure projects and different marine campaigns in each season.

2.91 The strategic commitments documents did not explain how these projects were identified as priorities, or what 'strategic goals' they would be contributing towards — for example, in relation to commitments outlined in the strategy and action plan, the research priorities identified in the decadal strategy, or the focus areas in the three-year summary.

Recommendation no. 3

2.92 The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water more clearly align its planned activities with the government's key commitments, including by:

- (a) developing and finalising the implementation plan for the Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy, and the infrastructure masterplans, in a timely manner, to clearly articulate the science and non-science priorities for the Australian Antarctic Program; and
- (b) clearly documenting its rationale for focusing on certain campaigns and projects as priorities for the relevant seasons in reference to these key strategic documents.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water response: *Agreed.*

2.93 *The department is working with the Antarctic science community and other stakeholders to finalise the implementation plan for the Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy and the infrastructure masterplans.*

2.94 *The department acknowledges that the rationale for campaign and project prioritisation can be better articulated and incorporated into AAD's planning processes. The AAD is focussed on maturing its integrated planning process which will address the issues raised in this recommendation.*

Has the department established appropriate workforce planning arrangements to support the delivery of the program?

The AAD does not have appropriate workforce planning arrangements to support the delivery of the program. Its consideration of workforce needs is focused on immediate seasonal recruitment and allocation of tickets to expeditioners. Training is provided to expeditioners based on their role, station, departure date and mode of transport. Expeditioner compliance with mandatory training requirements is not effectively monitored, and the department has limited assurance over whether the expeditioners are working on tasks they are not adequately trained for.

2.95 Under the department's enterprise agreement, AAD employees are defined as 'Expeditioner Employees' (who predominantly work in Antarctica) and 'Head Office Employees' (who predominantly work in Australia). As at May 2025, the AAD comprised 177 expeditioners and 350 head office employees (average FTE).

Workforce planning

2.96 The Australian Public Service Commission's (APSC) 2023 APS Workforce Planning Guide defines workforce planning as 'the process of ensuring that organisations have the right resources to achieve their organisational strategy'. Workforce planning is a key component of business planning that generates insights into an organisation's current and future workforce needs and risks arising from workforce capacity or capability gaps.

2.97 The APS Workforce Planning Guide describes four types of workforce planning: strategic, business, operational, and project or program management (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4: Types of workforce planning

Source: Adapted by ANAO from APS Workforce Planning Guide.

Strategic workforce planning

2.98 The department launched its inaugural People Strategy and Action Plan 2024–2026 on 9 February 2024, outlining how the department will ensure it has the workplace culture, capabilities and resources to deliver on its commitments in the corporate plan.

2.99 The People Strategy and Action Plan outlined 33 actions to be implemented throughout 2024. On 5 June 2025, the department advised the ANAO that a 2025 action plan has not been published as, since the release of the People Strategy and Action Plan 2024–2026, ‘multiple other strategies have been released, each with their own action plan’, and ‘[d]uplicating these actions into a 2025 People Strategy Action Plan would have little benefit and would only increase administrative burden’.

Business-level planning

2.100 The APS Workforce Planning Guide states that:

Integration of workforce planning into business planning processes ensures workforce planning is directly and immediately supporting future business deliverables and helps mitigate business risks. An integrated approach also assists in maturing workforce planning capability in an organisation, hence supporting improved workforce outcomes and alignment.

2.101 As outlined in paragraphs 2.67 to 2.70, a division plan for 2024–25 was not established at the AAD. The department’s business planning process requires further maturity. The absence of integrated workforce planning arrangements creates a risk of misalignment between workforce capabilities and organisational needs, potentially leading to inefficiencies, resource shortages, and an inability to meet strategic objectives.

Operational workforce planning

2.102 The AAD commenced developing a draft operational workforce plan in 2023. The department advised the ANAO on 23 May 2025 that the plan was ‘undergoing validation’, and that the final version of the workforce plan was scheduled for completion in September 2025. As at 10 October 2025, the workforce plan has not been finalised.

2.103 The draft workforce plan outlines the critical roles and priority capabilities identified ‘as essential to achieving and responding to future needs’, comprising:

- critical roles: project and program managers; technical specialist; general medical practitioners; technical specialists including science, ice core and data specialists; and
- priority capabilities: partnering and stakeholder engagement; digital and data literacy; program and project management; business change and strategic communications.

2.104 The draft workforce plan does not indicate whether this is a short-, medium- or longer-term future need. While it sets out high-level activities intended to support workforce attraction, recruitment and retention, it does not describe a clear future state for the workforce in terms of identifying required staffing numbers linked to skills, capabilities, location and strategies for delivering against its operational requirements.

2.105 The absence of a well-prepared workforce plan could exacerbate risks, including risks of safety incidents, operational disruptions, and an inability to achieve program objectives. Given the AAD’s operational context and high-risk environment, it is crucial to establish a workforce plan to identify and establish a workforce with the necessary skills and capabilities required to safely and effectively deliver on government priorities and achieve its objectives.

Program workforce planning

2.106 Workforce and staffing needs are considered during the season planning process. This is primarily driven by available ‘tickets’ (on ship or plane, to travel to Antarctica) and station beds for expeditioners.

2.107 The 2024–25 Season Plan does not provide a detailed outline of workforce needs, except in relation to the number of station support staff required to operate and maintain the stations year-round. The section on ‘Personnel and Logistics’ notes that ‘Delivery of the season is reliant on Head Office enabling sections being able to maintain current staff levels’. The season plan does not state what the current Head Office enabling sections’ staffing levels are. It also does not indicate whether there is contingency workforce available in case of leave, illnesses or other issues; or whether the 2024–25 season recruitment process resulted in sufficient expeditioner workforce to deliver the season.

Recommendation no. 4

2.108 The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water establish a workforce planning process for the AAD that considers both operational and long-term workforce requirements, linked to an assessment of risks and key capabilities needed to deliver on its objectives.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water response: *Agreed.*

2.109 *The AAD is developing a workforce plan for both head office staff and expeditioners and will continue to mature the plan to align it with longer-term operational, capability and risk management requirements.*

Workforce training

2.110 The AAD's work in Antarctica is seasonal, with most activities occurring in the summer operating season (October to April). A recruitment process is undertaken each year to hire expeditioners for the upcoming Antarctic season, which includes assessing the applicants' technical abilities as well as other attributes to ensure those capable of working in the extreme and isolated Antarctic environment are selected.³⁰ For the 2024–25 season, around 3,300 applications were received, 10 per cent of which were from returning expeditioners, and 436 expeditioners were contracted.³¹

2.111 Following recruitment, the AAD prepares and facilitates training tailored to each expeditioner. The Expeditioner Capability & Training section in the AAD's People and Culture Branch is responsible for capturing and monitoring training compliance for expeditioners participating in the program. The key training system and registers are outlined in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Key system and registers for expeditioner training

System/register	Purpose
Expeditioner Training Schedules registers	- Key scheduling and planning documents that capture the training requirements by expeditioner roles for every season. - AAD training team engages with subject matter experts to understand what training is required for the season, such as legislative, compliance and safety requirements, which informs the training profile for each role.
Training Management System	- Configures and assigns training requirements to expeditioners based on their roles. - Captures expeditioner training records including certificates, qualifications, online training completion, and training course attendance.
Outstanding Training and Exemptions register	- Captures: - approved exemptions to training or essential qualifications; - missed scheduled training; and

30 Expeditioner recruitment is announced via AAD's website: Australian Antarctic Program, *Jobs in Antarctica*, available from <https://jobs.antarctica.gov.au/jobs-in-antarctica/> [accessed 20 June 2025].

31 The number of contracted expeditioners includes some who have deployed more than once in this period due to being on multiple voyages or short summer deployments at different station locations. It does not include AAD Head Office employees who were ticketed to travel to Antarctica in the 2024–25 season.

System/register	Purpose
	– approvals to complete mandatory pre-departure training after departure (e.g., onboard the RSV <i>Nuyina</i> or on station).

Source: ANAO summary of the department's documentation.

2.112 Training Management System dashboards are used to verify the training status of an expeditioner. In some instances, an exemption from training completion may be granted. All exemptions and missed training must be captured in the 'Outstanding Training and Exemptions' register. For the 2024–25 season, 52 personnel had not completed one or more of the 243 training courses. The most common reason for non-completion was 'outstanding due to delay in commencement' (203 entries or 84 per cent). The register contains a column to record the status of missed training, the majority of which were blank (Table 2.4).

Table 2.4: Status of missed training in the register

Status	Number of entries in register	Percentage (%)
Outstanding: Exemption resolution not yet resolved	56	23
Completed: Training compliance achieved as agreed	34	14
Exemption: Exemption granted based on transport or season	2	1
Blank	151	62
Total	243	100

Source: ANAO analysis of Outstanding Training and Exemptions register.

2.113 The number of blank entries indicates that the register is not a reliable source of expeditioners' training status and compliance. Non-compliance with training is required to be followed up with expeditioners and their supervisors, voyage leaders or station leaders, and may limit what they can do on station. The department advised the ANAO on 5 June 2025 that '[t]here were no instances of training exemptions which prohibited an expeditioner from participating in the 2024–25 AAP season'.

2.114 However, without reliable data on who has completed the required training, supervisors may have incomplete information over the expeditioners' training compliance status, and the department has limited control and assurance over whether the expeditioners are working on tasks they are not adequately trained for. In a high-risk environment like Antarctica, this creates a significant safety risk for the workers, and WHS compliance risks for the department.

2.115 Ensuring that staff assigned to relevant roles have obtained the required qualifications and completed their mandatory training provides assurance that they have the capability to perform their duties to the expected standard. There is a need to strengthen the department's oversight over expeditioner training compliance.

Recommendation no. 5

2.116 To mitigate the risks arising from training non-compliance, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water implement arrangements to ensure that:

- (a) expeditioners complete their mandatory training prior to departure, with any exemptions and missed training accurately tracked and recorded; and
- (b) there are controls in place to verify and provide assurance that all expeditioners have completed the required training before they commence their duties.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water response: *Agreed.*

2.117 Extensive recruitment, training and inductions are undertaken to engage and prepare hundreds of expeditioners for a wide range of roles every year prior to deployment to Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. Since 2023, the AAD has conducted expeditioner summits prior to each deployment. These summits have enabled mandatory pre-departure training to be delivered to expeditioners in a dynamic and holistic way that suits different learning needs. The department acknowledges the need to improve tracking of mandatory training for expeditioners.

3. Delivery of the 2024–25 season

Areas examined

This chapter examines whether the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) in the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) is effectively managing the delivery of the Australian Antarctic Program (the program).

Conclusion

The department is partly effective in managing the delivery of the program. A new season planning process was introduced in 2023 for the 2024–25 season. The three key science deliverables for the 2024–25 season were largely delivered in accordance with the season plan. However, lack of a clear project management framework has led to varied and inconsistent arrangements being established for project-level oversight, risk management, and reporting. There is a need for the department to improve planning for the AAD's capital projects and consider whether its systems are fit for purpose to enable effective tracking of the AAD's infrastructure and maintenance works. While appropriate arrangements are in place to monitor season activities, the role of After Activity Reviews has not been clearly established and there are no clear processes to evaluate the overall success of the season in achieving its objectives.

Areas for improvement

The ANAO made three recommendations aimed at: developing a project management framework; establishing an approach for the conduct of After Activity Reviews; and developing a process to evaluate the performance of completed seasons and document lessons learned.

The ANAO also suggested that the department:

- establish a structured process to escalate severe season risks;
- ensure project risk registers are complete and consistently updated; and
- consider if the AAD's systems are fit for purpose to accurately plan for, manage, and track the progress and expenditure of capital projects.

3.1 Each year, the AAD develops a season plan that identifies which activities will be supported in Antarctica, within available resources, logistics and infrastructure, over the summer operating season (October to April).

Are there appropriate season planning arrangements to support program activities?

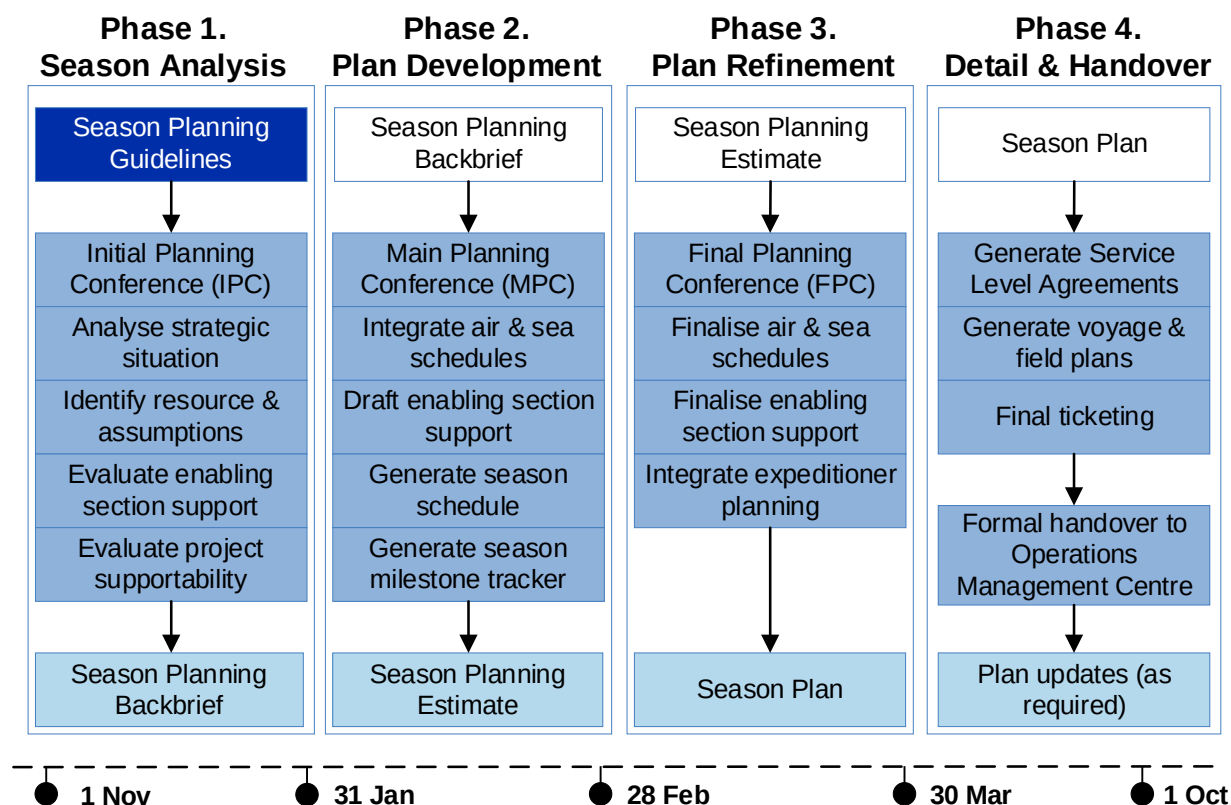
A new season planning process was introduced in 2023 for the 2024–25 season. There is clear procedure and guidance to support the season planning process. Season planning is informed by consideration of risk, available funding and resources, logistics, and alignment to strategic priorities. The season planning process does not include a structured approach to incorporating lessons learned from previous seasons. Season risks rated 'severe' were not escalated in accordance with requirements, reducing the effectiveness of risk management, oversight and decision-making.

Season Operations Planning Process

3.2 On 25 May 2023, the department engaged UBH Group for ‘operations planning process development’ at the AAD, which became known as the ‘Season Operations Planning Process (SOPP)’. The department’s contracting arrangements with UBH Group are examined at paragraphs 2.83 to 2.86.

3.3 The SOPP comprises four phases, commencing in November of the previous year until the handover to deliver the season in October (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: Season Operations Planning Process



Source: Adapted by ANAO from the department’s records.

3.4 A standard operating procedure has been developed that clearly outlines what each phase involves, including the required inputs, sub-steps, and outputs from each phase. Each phase produces a key output that commences the next phase of work.

3.5 There is evidence that some lessons learned from prior seasons have led to improvements in supply chain, maritime and aviation operations over a number of seasons. However, there is not a structured process within the SOPP in which to consider prior season activities and outcomes. Evaluation of season outcomes is examined at paragraphs 3.106 to 3.109.

Season planning guidelines

3.6 As outlined in Figure 3.1, the SOPP commences upon receipt of the season planning guidelines (SPG). The SPG outlined the three ‘most resource intensive projects’ (more information on these projects is in Table 3.2) that would drive planning for 2024–25:

- ongoing support for Australia's four permanent stations (Casey, Davis, Mawson and Macquarie Island) and Wilkins Aerodrome, with the minimum staffing requirements for each of these operations;
- finishing the Denman Terrestrial Campaign (DTC) and progressing the Million Year Ice Core (MYIC) project, which includes substantial logistic support equivalent to two additional stations; and
- delivering a new major science voyage, the Denman Marine Voyage (DMV), which will include completion of prioritised RSV *Nuyina* commissioning activities for essential science systems for that voyage.

3.7 In addition to the major commitments and projects, there were 52 proposed projects for the 2024–25 season. On 23 January 2024, the Head of Division approved the SPG and the list of proposed projects to be considered for the 2024–25 season.

Phase 1 — season analysis

3.8 The SOPP standard operating procedure states that phase 1 of the SOPP 'involves gathering and reviewing all relevant guidance and information, identifying key deductions, and establishing critical assumptions, constraints, and risks'.

3.9 A key part of phase 1 included a 'project supportability analysis', which commenced on 5 January 2024. The project supportability analysis 'involves assessing the overall [program] Project Load and the specific project details ... against the provisional shipping and aviation schedules; station, staffing and physical resource capacity'.

3.10 The analysis informed the season planning backbrief, which is the key output of phase 1. The backbrief outlined the season's priorities as interpreted from the strategic guidance in the 2024–25 SPG; the major assumptions made to form the basis of the 2024–25 season; and key challenges identified for the season, including the need to confirm available funding for 2024–25 and internal budgetary pressures. It also outlined the key risks, noting that the severe risk from the 2023–24 season risk assessment (unserviceability/unavailability of RSV *Nuyina*) will carry over into 2024–25.

3.11 The backbrief was provided to the Head of Division for approval on 7 February 2024, along with 2024–25 shipping options and an estimate of minimum 2024–25 station support staff requirements. The Head of Division noted the backbrief on 6 March 2024.

Phase 2 — plan development

3.12 Phase 2 of the SOPP involves:

the preparation of viable plans for achieving the season's objectives and milestones. The majority of the Season Plan is developed during this step, in collaboration with the Enabling Sections and other stakeholders.

3.13 At the end of March 2024, a brief was provided to the Head of Division seeking approval of the 'season plan estimate'. The brief stated that:

The Estimate outlines the further operationalisation of the Season Planning Guidelines as provided and includes emerging issues, including resourcing, that will impact the delivery of the full suite of activities outlined in the Season Planning Guidelines.

3.14 Following analysis of shipping and aviation availabilities, project supportability, and station capacity, the season plan estimate presented six options to the Head of Division for the 2024–25 season, based on RSV *Nuyina* shipping days (250/235, 200 or 180 days) and station capacity (100 per cent or 80 per cent) (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Summary of season options in the season plan estimate

Option	Resupply of four stations	DTC & MYIC	DMV	Cost implications
1. 250/235 ship days ^a , 100% station capacity	✓	✓	✓	Additional to projected budget — requires \$10M for shipping related operational costs.
2. 250/235 ship days ^a , 80% station capacity	✓	✓	✓	Additional to projected budget — requires \$10M for shipping related operational costs. Some savings may be realised due to station capacity and project reductions.
3. 200 ship days, 100% station capacity	✓	✓	✗	Within projected budget.
4. 200 ship days, 80% station capacity	✓	✓	✗	Within projected budget with some savings that may be realised due to station capacity and project reductions.
5. 180 ship days, 100% station capacity	✓	✓	✗	Under projected budget.
6. 180 ship days, 80% station capacity	✓	✓	✗	Under projected budget with some savings that may be realised due to station capacity and project reductions.

Note a: The number of shipping days differed depending on where the RSV *Nuyina* would conduct the port call prior to the voyage — Hobart (250 days) or Fremantle (235 days).

Source: ANAO summary of six season options.

3.15 The season plan estimate noted that analysis had been undertaken ‘to determine if opportunity exists to support 235/250 days of RSV *Nuyina* shipping in 24–25’. The additional shipping days would need to be offset by cost reductions in other areas such as non-renewal of some aviation contracts. It was determined that the costs of such options ‘far outweigh[ed]’ the benefits of additional shipping days for RSV *Nuyina*. The estimate advised that:

As a result, the preferred option now in this Planning Estimate is Option 4. This options best meets the planning guidelines in particular the guidance around assumed budget, priority projects and contingency.

3.16 The season plan estimate noted that Option 4 did not include the DMV, and outlined the proposed steps to notify project proponents if the recommended option is accepted.

3.17 The Head of Division signed the brief on 5 April 2024, not approving the recommended option. The Head of Division requested that Option 2 be adopted to include the DMV, ‘noting that this will require additional funding in the order of \$10 million in 2024–25’.

3.18 In the 2024–25 Federal Budget, the department received \$17.6 million over two years from 2024–25 ‘to increase RSV *Nuyina*’s operational days at sea to support additional delivery of marine science and environmental activities’.

Phase 3 — plan refinement

3.19 Phase 3 of the SOPP ‘evolves the Season Planning Estimate into the Season Plan’. It involves ‘the refinement of schedules, supporting concepts, confirmation of ticketing and other personnel considerations’.

3.20 On 28 May 2024, the draft 2024–25 Season Plan was provided to the Head of Division for approval. It stated that:

Following your annotated directions on the Season Planning Estimate Brief ... the draft Season Plan has been designed around 260 shipping days (to incorporate the Denman Marine Voyage), 80 per cent capacity at stations (to better manage workloads of our people and incorporate contingency), the finalisation of the Denman Terrestrial Campaign and the continued delivery of the Million Year Ice Core project.

3.21 The Head of Division approved the draft season plan on 6 June 2024. The season plan outlined the number of projects and personnel assessed as supportable in the 2024–25 season, in addition to the minimum station maintenance activities and staff. This included 22 science projects and 81 science personnel, which comprised 17 per cent of total deployments (up from 11 per cent in 2023–24).

3.22 The season plan also provided an overview of:

- full station support staff required to operate and maintain stations year-round (see paragraph 3.91);
- season risk assessment (see paragraphs 3.26 to 3.27); and
- coordinating instructions, including that the Operations Management Centre (OMC) will monitor the achievement of milestones outlined in the season plan and schedule and conduct After Activity Reviews (AARs) (see paragraphs 3.94 to 3.102).

Phase 4 — detail and handover

3.23 Phase 4 of the SOPP ‘provides the opportunity for subordinate planning, risk mitigation, ticketing, and handover’ to the OMC.

3.24 Subordinate planning includes the development of Service Level Agreements (SLAs). The purpose of the SLAs is to:

- outline prioritised project objectives, and activities required to achieve those objectives for the season; and
- document details of the required support for each project (for example, project tickets allocated, training requirements, station or ICT support).

3.25 Once the SLA is approved, the OMC is responsible for overseeing its delivery. The ‘formal handover’ to the OMC to deliver the 2024–25 season occurred on 19 September 2024. The handover meeting outlined key roles and responsibilities and risk management activities. Paragraph 3.38 outlines the operationalisation of SLAs during the season.

Season risk assessment

3.26 Season risk registers are used to identify and manage risks to season delivery. As at October 2024 (the commencement of the 2024–25 summer operating season), the season risk register outlined 21 risks, including: inability to medically evaluate critically ill patients; WHS incidents (physical and psychosocial); inability to deliver critical cargo; and inability to fully deliver major commitments in the 2024–25 Season Plan.

3.27 The season risk registers are updated monthly, and an update on season risks is provided at monthly meetings of the Antarctic Operations Committee.³² Updates to the register include changes to the risk controls and treatments. Risks that are no longer relevant to the season are closed and removed from the risk register, and emerging risks are identified and assessed.

Escalation of season risks

3.28 The department's Enterprise Risk Management Framework (ERMF) provides that risks rated 'severe' should be 'elevated to the Deputy Secretary immediately', with '[r]isk communication, management and mitigation to take precedence over all other activities'. Under the ERMF, the Deputy Secretary, as the Senior Responsible Officer, 'is ultimately responsible for ensuring that a program, project, [or] business area ... meets its objectives and delivers the projected benefits and has the authority on how risks will be managed'.

3.29 Between 21 and 23 risks were identified over the 2024–25 season. There were three risks assessed as 'severe' at various points: WHS incidents (physical); inability to resupply stations; and unserviceability/unavailability of RSV *Nuyina*. In December 2024, a brief was prepared for the Head of Division, outlining the three severe risks for the 2024–25 season to be escalated to the Deputy Secretary. The November 2024 version of the season risk register was attached to the brief. The brief was provided to the Head of Division for review and clearance on 5 February 2025, noting that approval was time sensitive as escalation was overdue.

3.30 The brief was not cleared. A comment from the Head of Division on 19 May 2025 requested that the brief be closed 'as overtaken', noting that 'this risk has been elevated regularly throughout the year to both the board and the Deputy Secretary and is actively managed'.

3.31 One of the three severe risks (unserviceability/unavailability of RSV *Nuyina*) had previously been reported to the Program Management Board (PMB) on 31 May 2024 (the PMB was chaired by the Deputy Secretary — see paragraph 2.10). The PMB noted the severe risk, and requested that a 'fulsome Risk Assessment of the Season Plan' be provided out of session following consideration of the season plan by the Head of Division.

3.32 The out of session update on risk was not provided. In the subsequent meeting of the PMB on 29 August 2024, the PMB was disbanded and the Major Projects Board was established (see paragraph 2.12). There was no evidence that the other two severe season risks (WHS incidents (physical) and inability to resupply stations) were escalated as required.

3.33 Appropriate reporting and escalation of risks helps inform effective decision-making, and ensures that those with ultimate ownership and accountability for the management of risks receive the right information at the right time to discharge their own obligations. It also provides the

32 The Antarctic Operations Committee is a cross-branch body that advises on the development of and major changes to season plans. It comprises representatives from various branches at the AAD as well as a representative from the Bureau of Meteorology.

business areas with support and confidence to manage risks in accordance with the departmental risk appetite and tolerance.

Opportunity for improvement

3.34 As part of implementing Recommendation no. 1 (see paragraph 2.32), establishing a more consistent and structured process for risk escalation may help ensure that escalation of severe risks that are time-sensitive are not missed or overtaken by events. Where there is an overlap between ‘severe’ season risks and division risks, a regular risk reporting process may also reduce the need for duplicate reporting.

Were there fit-for-purpose arrangements to support the achievement of key deliverables for the 2024–25 season?

Lack of a clear project management framework has led to varied and inconsistent arrangements being established for project-level planning, oversight, risk management, and reporting. A historical pattern of significant variations in capital budget indicates improved planning for capital projects is needed. Ongoing capital infrastructure works and maintenance activities are managed and tracked via the AAD’s asset maintenance system, Maximo, which has issues with accuracy and completeness of information. There is an opportunity for the department to consider whether its systems are fit for purpose to enable effective planning, tracking and assurance over the delivery of its infrastructure and maintenance projects.

3.35 The 2024–25 Season Plan outlines six key deliverables, comprising three science and three non-science (infrastructure and maintenance) deliverables (Table 3.2). Appendix 6 outlines the projects being delivered under the key deliverables in more detail.

Table 3.2: Key deliverables in the 2024–25 Season Plan

Deliverable	Description	No. of projects	Timeframe
Key science deliverables			
Denman Terrestrial Campaign (DTC) ^a	Examined the Denman Glacier and the Shackleton Ice Shelf from land, to increase understanding of its history, structure, ecology and vulnerability to change. Research projects were staged from a deep field camp at Bunger Hills. ^b	7	2022–2025
Denman Marine Voyage (DMV) ^a	First dedicated marine science voyage for Australia’s icebreaker, RSV <i>Nuyina</i> . Studied the Denman Glacier region to learn more about the factors influencing the glacier’s melt rate.	5	2025
Million Year Ice Core (MYIC)	The MYIC project aims to drill an approximately 3.1km long ice core to provide historical climate data. It is enabled by the AAD’s traverse capability. ^c	2	2022–2030

Deliverable	Description	No. of projects	Timeframe
Key non-science deliverables			
Macquarie Island Critical Sustainment Works (CSW)	CSW is a distinct stream of work within the broader Macquarie Island Station Project (MISP), previously known as the Macquarie Island Modernisation Project (MIMP).	1	MIMP: 2016–2024 MISP: 2024–2031
Underway Capital Infrastructure Works	Focused on major maintenance activities and largescale replacement of assets.	1	Ongoing
Station sustainment of Casey, Davis, Mawson and Macquarie Island	All maintenance and operational activities that are required to ensure safe operation of station plant, equipment and infrastructure.	1	Ongoing

Note a: The DTC and DMV are collaborative projects with Monash University and the University of Tasmania.

Note b: Bungar Hills is located approximately 450 kilometres west of Casey research station.

Note c: The AAD's traverse capability is a separate project that began in 2017 and allows for inland Antarctic travel and transportation of MYIC infrastructure and ice core drill.

Source: ANAO summary of key deliverables in 2024–25.

3.36 As outlined in Table 3.2 and Appendix 6, key science deliverables such as the DTC and the DMV encompass the delivery of a number of projects. Other projects, such as science monitoring projects and maintenance projects, may be delivered on station or on voyages.

3.37 For all science and non-science projects, the project leads are required to submit a project application, outlining the project team, project objectives, intended project activities and timeline, and project outcomes and measures of success. For projects prioritised for delivery, these project applications and logistics scoping documents are used to determine supportability requirements (such as number of tickets required to travel to Antarctica) during season planning.

3.38 As outlined at paragraph 3.24, once the season plan is approved with a list of supportable projects, subordinate planning is to occur via the development of SLAs and field, voyage and traverse orders.

- SLAs outline the operational and logistical support required for each project. Some SLAs cover multiple projects sharing resources or personnel, while others encompass several streams of work and may have multiple SLAs.
- Field, voyage and traverse orders are operational instructions provided to field, voyage and traverse leaders shortly before their departure, outlining strategic outcomes and intent of the relevant activity, including any projects to be supported.

3.39 There is no project management framework at the department or the AAD that outlines the requirements or provides guidance on the appropriate project delivery arrangements, for individual projects or for key deliverables that encompass multiple projects — for example, what planning documents are required, what level of oversight is appropriate, and how often and through what channels the project will be required to report on progress. While differences in project management approaches are to be expected as projects can differ in scale, risk and complexity, the differing arrangements for the AAD's projects lack coherence without a project management framework.

3.40 On 17 March 2025, the department advised the ANAO that:

The Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) has not yet developed a mature project management framework. This is partly attributed to the transition from the Program Management Board (PMB) to the Major Projects Board (MPB), as well as ongoing efforts to establish and refine governance practices. The AAD will leverage existing frameworks and best practices from the department, aligning with broader organisational standards as governance maturity improves.

3.41 Delivery of programs, projects and activities of varying scale and complexity comprises one of the AAD’s core functions. Lack of a fit-for-purpose project management framework increases the risk of inconsistent approaches being taken to project governance, risk management, reporting, and evaluation that are not commensurate with their cost, importance and risk profile. For example, it is not evident what kinds of projects or deliverables would benefit from a project-level oversight body such as a steering committee, and when collaborative projects should establish an interdepartmental committee as opposed to an internal oversight body. There is a need for greater clarity in oversight and accountability structures for projects being delivered by the AAD.

Recommendation no. 6

3.42 The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water develop a project management framework for the AAD, outlining how projects and multi-project campaigns of different size and complexity should be classified, managed, delivered and reported on.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water response: *Agreed.*

3.43 *The department acknowledges that the AAD manages a large and complex suite of projects and that it would benefit from the development of a project management framework to better support project planning, oversight, risk management, delivery and reporting.*

Science deliverables for the 2024–25 season

3.44 In the absence of clear requirements for project management, varied arrangements were established for planning, oversight, risk management and reporting for the three key science deliverables. The ANAO’s assessment of the arrangements in place for the delivery of the three science deliverables are outlined in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Arrangements for delivery of 2024–25 science deliverables

Deliverable	Planning	Oversight	Risk management	Reporting
DTC	▲	▲	◆	◆
DMV	▲	▲	▲	◆
MYIC	◆	▲	▲	▲

Key: ◆ Arrangements are established and implemented
▲ Arrangements are partly established or implemented
■ Arrangements are not established or implemented

Source: ANAO analysis.

Planning

3.45 The AAD finalised an overarching plan for one of the three key science deliverables.

- For DTC and DMV, separate ‘operational support project plans’ were drafted, but neither were finalised — there were no outcomes or objectives of their own against which the overall success of the campaigns could be measured.
- For MYIC, a project plan was established for the traverse capability project, which preceded and led into the MYIC project. This project plan was developed in 2018 following receipt of funding in the 2016–17 Federal Budget. It outlined the project outcomes, outputs, milestones and governance arrangements.

3.46 For projects and other operational activities (field, voyage and traverse activities), the following served as key planning documents.

- There were project applications for each of the projects and a range of SLAs.
- There were field, voyage, and traverse orders as relevant. Field and traverse orders for the DTC and MYIC were approved in November 2024. Voyage orders for Voyage 3 (DMV) were approved in February 2025.

Oversight

3.47 The DMV and DTC are overseen by the SRI/AAPP³³ Operation Implementation Steering Committee (SRI/AAPP Steering Committee). The SRI/AAPP Steering Committee’s membership includes representatives of the AAD’s Science and Operations branches, as well as the Australian Antarctic Program Partnership (AAPP), Securing Antarctica’s Environmental Future (SAEF), and the Australian Centre for Excellence in Antarctic Science (ACEAS).

3.48 The SRI/AAPP Steering Committee held its first meeting in August 2021 and last met in January 2025. Its terms of reference were approved at the third meeting in August 2022. Meeting records are not complete. Records of meeting outcomes were retained for 13 of 24 meetings held between August 2021 and January 2025. Formal records of action items were retained for 10 meetings and were not used after meeting 12 (August 2023). After this date, the only meeting outcomes available were brief informal notes for three meetings.

3.49 The MYIC was overseen by the Traverse Capability Steering Committee, which met for the first time and approved its terms of reference in July 2017. In August 2022, this was renamed to the MYIC Steering Committee. The MYIC Steering Committee did not meet between August 2022 and May 2024.

3.50 In June 2024, the AAD Head of Division approved the cessation of the MYIC Steering Committee, on the basis that its function could be undertaken by the Division Management Committee (DMC). The DMC did not discuss the MYIC when it had oversight between June 2024 and November 2024. Oversight of the MYIC passed to the Major Projects Board (MPB) when it was established in November 2024.

33 SRI refers to the Special Research Initiatives scheme administered by the Australian Research Council, which funds two research programs that helped deliver the DTC and DMV: Australian Centre for Excellence in Antarctic Science (ACEAS) and Securing Antarctica’s Environmental Future (SAEF). The Australian Antarctic Program Partnership (AAPP) is a partnership of Australia’s leading Antarctic research institutions supported by the Australian Government Antarctic Science Collaboration Initiative.

3.51 The DMV is also overseen by the MPB. Updates on both the DMV and MYIC were provided at the MPB's February, May and July 2025 meetings. MPB's role and functions are examined at paragraphs 2.13 to 2.17.

Risk management

3.52 Risks and controls were documented for each of the key science deliverables in risk registers. The risk registers were updated at varying intervals over the years, with the latest versions dated June 2024 (for MYIC); September 2024 (for DMV); and October 2024 (for DTC).

3.53 Not all required information was consistently included in the risk registers for DMV and MYIC. In the DMV risk register, the columns for risk tolerance, risk acceptance, treatment owners, treatment due dates, and target risk ratings were blank in all versions except for the 11 July 2024 version. For the MYIC risk register, columns to record the risk tolerance and risk acceptance for the current and target risk ratings were blank.

Opportunity for improvement

3.54 Ensuring that risk registers are complete and consistently updated could support more effective risk management.

Reporting

3.55 Field, voyage and traverse leaders are responsible for submitting:

- daily situation reports (daily SITREPs) to the OMC; and
- a field, voyage or traverse report after returning to Australia outlining how the relevant activity had gone.

3.56 Daily SITREPs to the OMC included updates on the activities of the delivery personnel, including progress in implementing the individual science projects. Daily SITREPs were substantially complete for all three deliverables.

3.57 Field and voyage reports were completed for the DTC and DMV. These reports included summaries provided for individual science projects outlining what proportion of their planned activities (as outlined in the field and voyage orders) were completed. A field or traverse report was not completed for MYIC.

3.58 The department advised the ANAO on 13 March 2025 that project leads for science projects complete annual milestone reports for each year the project is in operation. Milestone reports include the project lead's assessment of the project's progress against its objectives and milestones, as outlined in its project application (see paragraph 3.37), and any requests for a variation to the project. As at October 2025, milestone reports for 2024–25 were submitted for 11 of 12 science projects³⁴ being delivered under or as part of the three science deliverables.

Non-science deliverables for the 2024–25 season

3.59 The three key non-science deliverables have varying arrangements for governance, delivery, risk management and reporting. The Macquarie Island Critical Sustainment Works are managed as

34 There are a total of 14 projects listed against the science deliverables in Table 3.2. Two of these projects are operations and logistics support projects that support the relevant science deliverable. See Appendix 6.

part of a distinct project, while capital infrastructure works and station sustainment comprise a package of infrastructure and asset maintenance works being delivered on an ongoing basis.

Macquarie Island Critical Sustainment Works

3.60 As outlined in Table 3.2, the ‘Macquarie Island Critical Sustainment Works’ (CSW) are a distinct stream of work within the broader Macquarie Island Station Project (MISP), previously known as the Macquarie Island Modernisation Project (MIMP).

3.61 The 2016 strategy and action plan recognised the need to develop an approach regarding the future of ageing infrastructure on Macquarie Island.

- In October 2016, the government announced \$49.8 million for a new research station on Macquarie Island to replace the ageing infrastructure with a more efficient and environmentally friendly station, leading to the establishment of MIMP.
- In September 2020, a revised business case for MIMP was endorsed by the government as it became apparent that the funding provided in the original measure would not be sufficient to deliver a new station, and focus shifted to addressing deficiencies in the existing infrastructure.
- In 2022, serious weather and seismic events forced a further re-orientation of the project to address storm erosion issues and work health and safety concerns, including landslips, asbestos and electrical shock risks.

3.62 A number of reviews of MIMP were conducted in 2022 and 2023, including a Stret Pty Ltd Strategic Review in November 2022 and four Department of Finance Gateway Reviews (in August 2022, February 2023, June 2023, and August 2023), which noted the inadequacy of funding assigned to the project and that the overall successful delivery of the program appeared to be unachievable.³⁵ Based on the recommendations of these reviews, in March 2024, a Detailed Business Case (business case) was developed to support a funding proposal for the 2024–25 Federal Budget.

3.63 The 2024–25 Federal Budget provided \$163.3 million over four years from 2024–25 (and an additional \$207.8 million from 2028–29 to 2032–33) to continue critical safety works and rebuild the Macquarie Island research station to enable delivery of year-round monitoring and scientific programs.

3.64 MIMP was closed on 30 June 2024, and MISP was initiated on 1 July 2024. At the time of cessation, total expenditure for MIMP was around \$26.1 million, including \$8.7 million for critical sustainment works in 2023–24. The remaining MIMP funding of \$23.7 million was allocated to offset the new measure in the 2024–25 Federal Budget.

3.65 An end stage Gateway Review report for MIMP in June 2024 noted that ‘[s]ince its inception the Project has been subject to delays outside the control of AAD’, including COVID-19, major environmental events, delays in the delivery and commissioning of RSV *Nuyina*, and long lead times for approvals under the Macquarie Island Nature Reserve and World Heritage Area Management Plan 2006. The Gateway Review also noted that the MIMP benefits realisation plan had not been

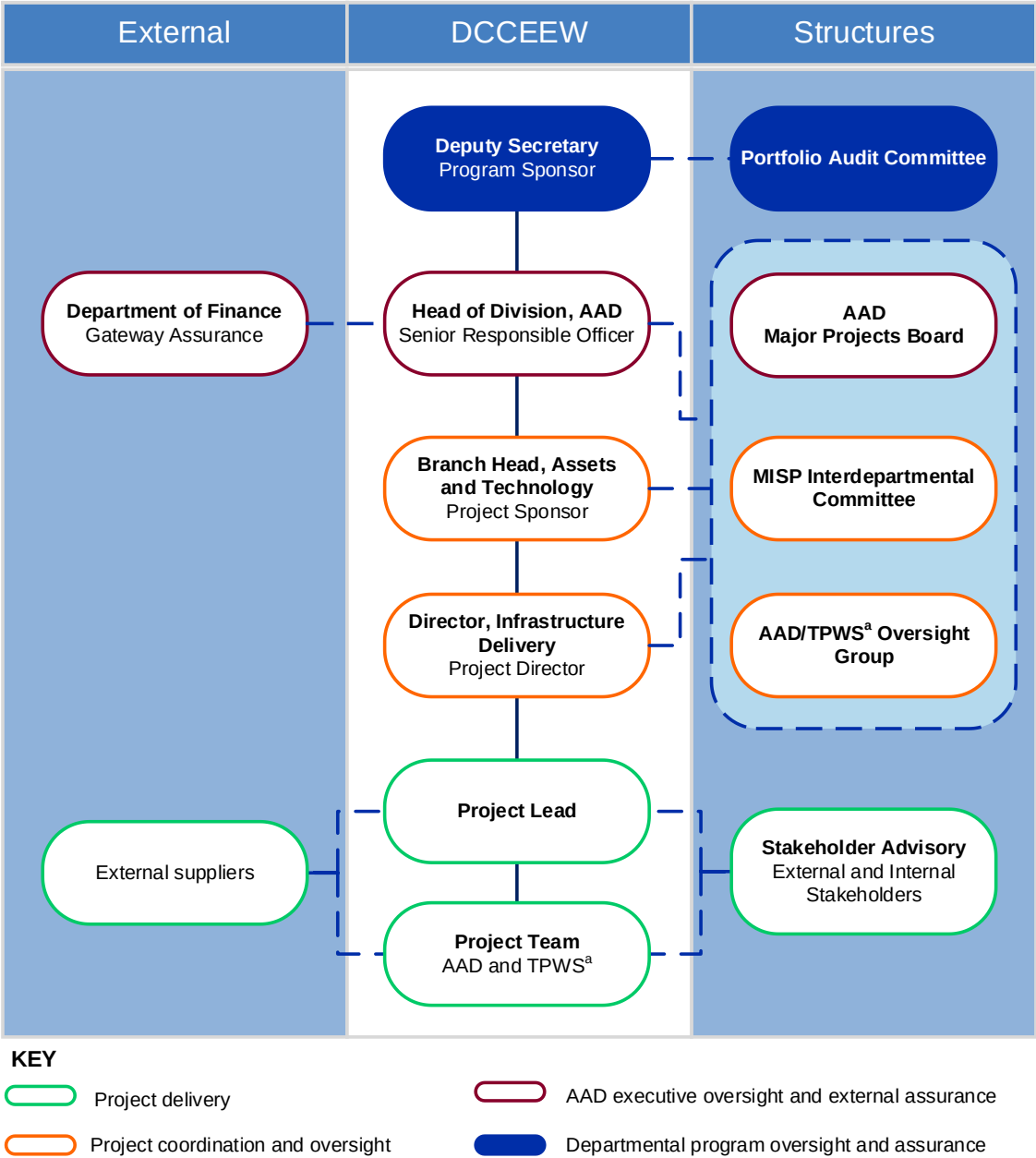
35 The Department of Finance conducted a total of 13 Gateway Reviews over seven years from August 2017 to June 2024 in relation to MIMP and during its the transition to MISP, and two reviews of MISP. Gateway Reviews aim to strengthen governance and assurance practices and assist non-corporate Commonwealth entities to successfully deliver major projects and programs.

maintained in sync with these changes, and that ‘[g]overnance for the Project appears to have been less effective than it needed to be for a complex, multi-stakeholder implementation’. In noting the transition of the project to MISP, the Gateway Review emphasised the planning and design phase of MISP as ‘a critical first step vital for overall success’.

3.66 A project management plan, a governance plan and a benefits realisation plan for MISP were developed and approved on 16 January 2025. A communication and stakeholder engagement plan was delivered on 22 July 2025. As at 10 October 2025 a risk management plan is in draft.

3.67 The MISP governance plan outlines the governance structure for the project (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Macquarie Island Station Project governance structure



Note a: TPWS refers to Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service.
Source: Adapted by ANAO from the department’s records.

3.68 MISP is one of the major projects overseen by the MPB. As of 11 July 2025, the MPB had received an update on MISP at each of its five meetings. At a project level, MISP was overseen by a steering committee, which held its first and last meeting on 30 October 2024. It has since been superseded by an interdepartmental committee (IDC) which was established and met for the first time in April 2025.

3.69 The IDC is not a decision-making body and is accountable to the MISP project sponsor. The purpose of the IDC is to provide oversight of the MISP to ensure the successful achievement of project outcomes. Membership of the IDC comprises: the department, the Department of Finance, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Geoscience Australia and the Bureau of Meteorology.

3.70 The AAD/TPWS Oversight Working Group was established for the AAD to engage with Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service (TPWS).³⁶ It 'aims to provide a coordinated approach' between the AAD and TPWS in 'planning of activities to successfully deliver the Macquarie Island Station Project works'. Membership comprises staff from the AAD and TPWS. The first meeting of the AAD/TPWS Oversight Working Group was held on 16 October 2024, where the attendees discussed the purpose of the meetings and project introduction. Six meetings have been held as at 30 July 2025.

2024–25 Critical Sustainment Works

3.71 The MISP project management plan outlines three elements for the project (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: Macquarie Island Station Project elements as outlined in the project management plan

Project element	Objective	Timeframe
Critical Sustainment Works (CSW)	Make safe station facilities to address significant environmental, operational, WHS concerns and improve expeditioner wellbeing.	2024–2026
New Research Station (NRS) planning, design & delivery	Reduced risks of WHS incidents and improved station amenity and expeditioner wellbeing through the provision of new facilities in accordance with contemporary design standards.	2024–2031
Existing station removal	Gradual demolition, removal and rehabilitation of the existing station in coordination with the new station delivery.	2027–2033

Source: ANAO summary of MISP project elements.

3.72 Under the initial business case, the CSW project element of MISP was to be delivered over three years with a budget of \$38.9 million. CSW is intended to stabilise the infrastructure on Macquarie Island, including replacement and or refurbishment of critical assets that are: at the end of their life; a risk to workplace health and safety; or an environmental and reputational risk.

3.73 A project delivery plan for CSW (a sub-plan to the MISP project management plan) was finalised on 16 January 2025. The plan outlines 25 milestones, which include target dates and 'predicted date[s]'.³⁷ Of these, three milestones were 'predicted' to be completed in the 2024–25

36 The TPWS is responsible for managing the Macquarie Island Nature Reserve and World Heritage Area. The department is responsible for managing the Macquarie Island Station and supporting the scientists and staff that work there.

37 Target dates refer to the original planned dates for CSW milestones. Predicted dates are the revised dates to CSW milestones as a result of the delays to the MISP.

season. On 23 June 2025, the department advised the ANAO that all three 2024–25 CSW milestones had been completed, along with three additional milestones.

3.74 At the March 2025 meeting of the MPB, it was reported that CSW was unlikely to be able meet its objectives and milestones as described in the business case (that is, completion by 2026), with a significant underspend in the 2024–25 operating budget and a shortfall expected at the back end of the project in 2033. This was largely due to a smaller than planned project team which impacted the timely engagement of consultants and contractors to develop key planning documents. In July 2025, MISF reported an operating budget underspend of \$1.53 million (against a budget of \$5.14 million), and a capital budget underspend of \$4.8 million (against a budget of \$7.78 million) for 2024–25. The department advised the ANAO on 25 July that the CSW change order request was in development and expected to be submitted to the project sponsor for approval in August 2025. As at 10 October 2025, the CSW change order request has not been finalised.

3.75 On 30 May 2025 the department advised the ANAO that ‘delays in delivering the CSW are not expected to impact delivery of the new station by 2031, however, some works may crossover within current season delivery timeframes’.

Capital infrastructure works

3.76 Capital infrastructure works are focused on major maintenance activities, largescale replacement of assets, and work to upgrade Antarctic infrastructure. They are delivered as part of the broader AAD capital program.

3.77 The 2024–25 AAD capital program and budget was approved by the Head of Division on 2 July 2024. The brief to the Head of Division noted that the ‘initial 2024–25 request totalled over \$94 million with significant budget pressures in future financial years’, and that ‘[s]ubstantial program reprioritisation with reduction and reprofiling of projects was required to fit the proposed capital budget within the available budget’. Table 3.5 summarises the AAD’s capital program budget for 2024–25, which included budget for upgrades to station infrastructure, as well as science, operational and logistical equipment.

Table 3.5: Australian Antarctic Division capital program budget

Project type	Original request (\$m)	2024–25 approved budget (\$m)
Major projects	\$64.6	\$62.3
Minor projects (essential only)	\$30.1	\$18.6
Total	\$94.7	\$80.9

Source: ANAO summary of AAD’s 2024–25 capital budget.

3.78 The AAD’s 2024–25 capital budget of \$80.9 million was approved based on anticipated approval of a movement of funds request of \$24.5 million from 2023–24. Despite an oversubscribed capital program, there is a recurring pattern in the AAD of significant underspends in capital budgets ‘due to long lead times for procurement and contracts for bespoke goods and services’, and subsequent movement of funds to offset and fund program needs. In March 2025, the DMC was advised that there had been a movement of funds request for ‘each of the last three years averaging

\$23.6 million per year', and as at May 2025, it was estimated that there would be an underspend of around \$30 million from the approved 2024–25 capital budget.

3.79 Movement of funds requests require the Finance Minister's approval which is not guaranteed, putting funding for larger projects at risk. The recurring pattern of variations in capital budget indicates improved planning for capital projects is needed. In May 2025, the DMC was provided and noted an update on the processes, frameworks, and tools developed by the AAD Investment Management Team to support the review and prioritisation of 2025–26 capital projects, while strengthening effective out-year forecasting and budget management.

3.80 Once the AAD capital program for the season is approved by the Head of Division, 'season construction plans' are developed outlining capital works relating to infrastructure upgrades at each Antarctic station (Casey, Davis and Mawson) for the relevant season. The capital infrastructure works are scheduled and managed via raising workorders in the AAD's asset maintenance system, Maximo.

3.81 The construction plans for the 2024–25 capital infrastructure works were developed for each Antarctic station, outlining: a list of capital infrastructure projects resourced to be completed in the relevant season; the oversight arrangements for the planned works at each station; and, in the Davis and Mawson construction plans, a project risk register (the construction plan for Casey station did not include a risk register). Table 3.6 outlines the 2024–25 capital infrastructure projects and their status as at 30 June 2025.

Table 3.6: All resourced 2024–25 station capital infrastructure projects and status

Station	Completed	Partially completed	On hold or delivery ongoing ^a	Total no. of projects
Davis	2	2	1	5
Casey	5	2	5	12
Mawson	0	1	7	8
Total				25

Note a: Completion of works were impacted by a range of factors including short seasons, resourcing constraints or projects with multiple phases.

Source: ANAO summary and analysis of AAD station season construction plans and reporting.

AAD asset maintenance system — Maximo

3.82 Maximo is an IBM software product that includes a number of modules that can be used for asset and inventory management. The AAD uses Maximo to 'manage the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic Asset Maintenance and Capital Projects', including for 'producing and controlling work schedules, maintaining Asset histories and producing reports'.³⁸

3.83 The ANAO reviewed all approved 2024–25 projects listed in the construction plans and those with corresponding workorders in Maximo (see Table 3.6). Of the 25 approved projects, 21 had workorders in Maximo. The following issues were identified.

38 Maximo does not interface with the department's financial management system.

- It was unclear when changes were made to workorders, as this is not recorded in Maximo and is reliant on AAD staff using the 'long description' field to appropriately record changes and updates.
- Planned labour hours were not recorded for all workorders, and actual labour hours were not recorded for any.
- Roles and/or positions of staff creating or changing workorders are not recorded in Maximo, including for Capital Projects and Minor New Works workorders that require a higher level of authorisation.
- All workorders recorded a target start date. However, 'target finish', 'scheduled start' and 'scheduled finish' dates were recorded inconsistently. Noting the varied start dates for works due to be delivered in the 2024–25 season (as some works have been ongoing for a number of years), it is unclear when these works are expected to be completed as this information is not recorded in Maximo.

3.84 Of the workorders examined by the ANAO, on average 39 per cent of projects across the three stations did not have appropriate information to determine when and if a project was completed, and the status of a project if it had not been completed.

3.85 The construction plans outlined a requirement for the Engineering Services Supervisor(s) and Building Services Supervisor(s) to submit a monthly and annual budget and labour hours report to the Antarctic Infrastructure/Construction Group in Kingston. Information in the monthly reports were consistent with construction plans and accurately tracked the progress of these projects. Reporting for all three stations had inconsistencies with information recorded in Maximo.

Opportunity for improvement

3.86 The department could consider whether there are fit-for-purpose systems in place in the AAD to accurately plan for, manage, and track the progress and expenditure of capital projects against intended delivery, including as outlined in the season construction plans.

Station sustainment

3.87 On 27 August 2025, the department advised the ANAO that it uses the term 'station sustainment' to refer to:

the core activities required to maintain a minimum level of capability, presence, and science activity at Australia's permanent stations in Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic. This includes:

- Resupplying stations with essential provisions and returning waste and cargo to Australia.
- Essential maintenance of station infrastructure.
- Recruitment, training, deployment and return of staff to Australia.
- Activities to ensure the health and safety of our people and the protection of environmental and heritage values.

Station maintenance

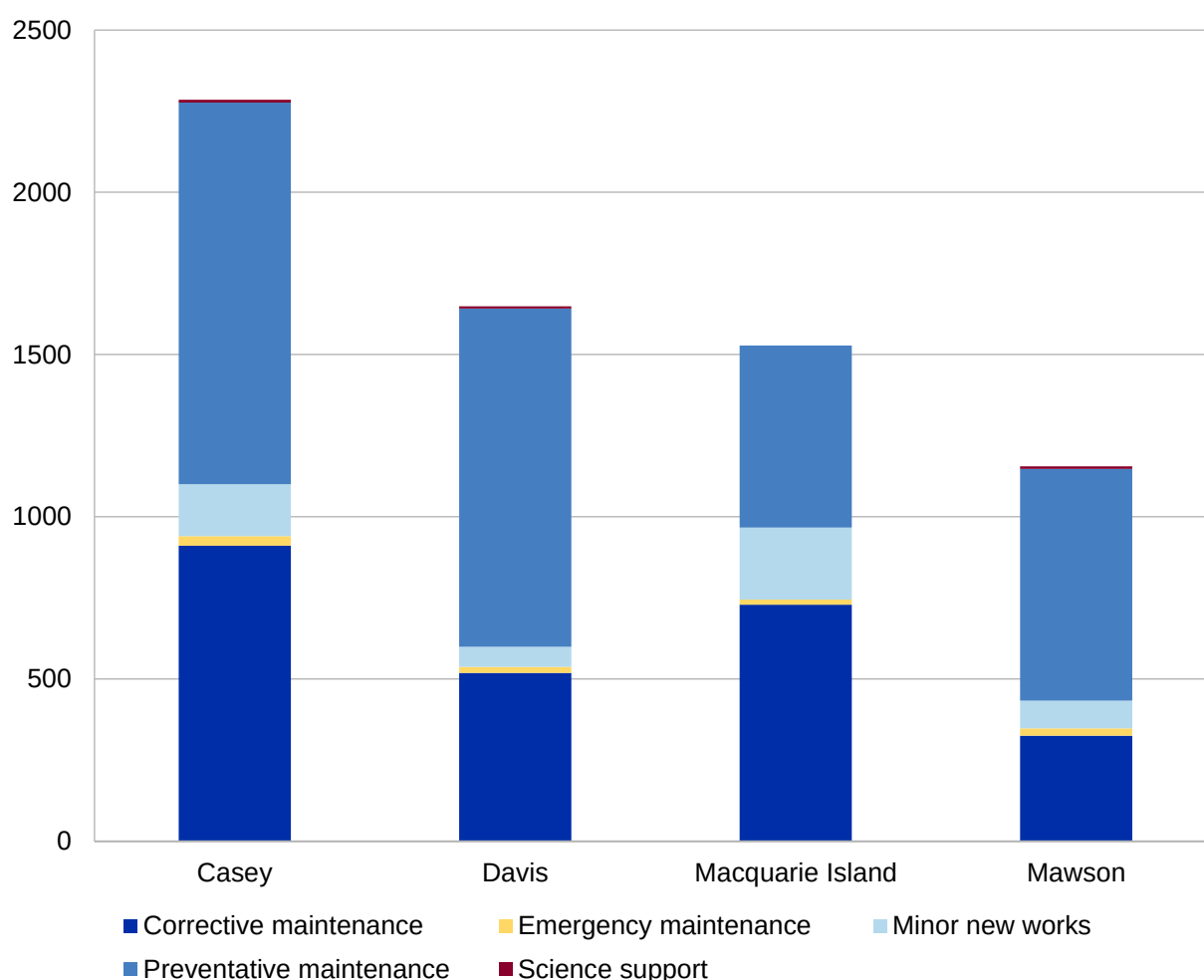
3.88 Like capital infrastructure works, maintenance works are managed through Maximo (see paragraphs 3.82 to 3.85), which contains maintenance instructions and maintenance plans for various equipment, plant and infrastructure across the stations. The Preventative Maintenance

(PM) application in Maximo is used to schedule and generate routine maintenance jobs and allocate them to the responsible trade. For example, electrical maintenance works for power generators or fire detection and alarm systems are scheduled annually at each station. As at 10 June 2025, there were 1,364 active PMs across all stations.

3.89 Similarly to the capital infrastructure works, monthly reports are developed to provide detailed progress of infrastructure and maintenance projects. The reports are in varying formats and contain different levels of information, with some providing a detailed list of completed, in-progress and planned workorders while others primarily contain photographs.

3.90 The ANAO examined a list of all completed maintenance works for the period 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, across all work types except for Capital Projects. There were 6,618 workorders recorded as completed in Maximo in the period 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, with the majority comprising 'Preventative Maintenance' and 'Corrective Maintenance' works (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Completed maintenance works, 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025



Source: ANAO analysis of Maximo maintenance work data.

3.91 The provision of infrastructure maintenance personnel is approved for each season during season planning. A summary of all station support positions required to operate and maintain stations year-round (including infrastructure and maintenance positions) was submitted to the

Head of Division in the final 2024–25 Season Plan. A total of 181 positions were outlined in the season plan across the four stations, comprising:

- 88 positions all year round; and
- 93 positions summer only.

Station resupply

3.92 A key station sustainment activity for the AAD is planning and conducting the station resupply voyages and flights during the summer season. These voyages and flights must deliver all food, fuel, equipment, plant, machinery and parts and other supplies that will be needed on-station over the following winter months, as there are few opportunities to ‘top up’ supplies that are not delivered in the summer. The summer and winter station staff and scientists are also transported to and from the stations via the resupply voyages and flights.³⁹ Inability to resupply stations was assessed as a severe risk in the 2024–25 season.

3.93 Table 3.7 outlines the dates the resupply and refuel voyages for the 2024–25 season took place for each station. The station resupply voyages were successful, with all stations resupplied with fuel, water, and other essential cargo, and required personnel exchanges taking place. A summary of intercontinental flights during the 2024–25 season is in Appendix 4, and a timeline of the 2024–25 season is in Appendix 5.

Table 3.7: Voyages to resupply and refuel stations

Station	Voyage schedule (arrive–depart)	Voyage operation (arrive–depart)
Davis (V1)	25 Oct 2024–3 Nov 2024	23 Oct 2024–4 Nov 2024
Casey (V2)	24 Dec 2024–2 Jan 2025	22 Dec 2024–4 Jan 2025
Mawson (V2)	18 Jan 2025–1 Feb 2025	18 Jan 2025–4 Feb 2025
Macquarie Island (V4)	15 May 2025–3 Jun 2025	7 May 2025–7 June 2025

Source: ANAO summary from entity records.

Are there appropriate arrangements to monitor and evaluate seasonal activities?

The arrangements in place to monitor and evaluate seasonal activities are mixed. There are appropriate arrangements to monitor seasonal activities. Arrangements are in place to evaluate some activities, but the role of After Activity Reviews has not been clearly established and the evaluation reports do not clearly articulate whether the desired objectives were achieved. Available reporting indicates that the Denman Marine Voyage and Denman Terrestrial Campaign took place as scheduled and supported all planned science projects. The Million Year Ice Core project was delayed but delivered the majority of planned activities. The department does not have an established process in place to evaluate the overall success of the season in achieving its objectives.

39 Under Operation Southern Discovery, the Department of Defence also provides regular airlifts during the summer months to deliver essential cargo and personnel to Antarctica.

Monitoring by the Operations Management Centre

3.94 As outlined at paragraph 3.22, the OMC is responsible for coordinating the delivery of the season plan and for monitoring whether planned season schedules for aviation, shipping and station open and closure dates are met. The OMC, established in 2022, sits within the Operations and Logistics branch in the AAD and delivers three key functions (Table 3.8).

Table 3.8: Functions of the Operations Management Centre

Function	Description
Watchkeeping	The OMC's role is to continuously monitor activities across all AAD operations to identify incidents or events that could disrupt the season plan or pose risks to the health, safety, or wellbeing of expeditioners, as well as assets and infrastructure. Watchkeepers undertake initial assessment of incidents that may meet these criteria and escalate to the Chief of Operations (Director of the OMC), who may then escalate to the Branch Head of Operations and Logistics, and potentially to the Head of Division, depending on the severity.
After hours contact	The OMC is an all-hours point of contact for the program and, in some cases, for the department. In the event of an emergency or business continuity incident involving an AAD station, ship, aircraft or field camp, the OMC is the central contact point for all stakeholders.
Emergency incident management	The OMC provides the AAD with a 24/7 incident management capability. Examples of incidents that may activate this function include: major incidents affecting the program (maritime or aviation accidents, critical infrastructure failure, serious medical incidents, major supply chain issues); a serious threat of injury or death to AAD personnel or third party; or threat of or actual damage to the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic environment.

Source: ANAO summary of OMC functions.

3.95 The OMC's operations are guided by a handbook and standard operating procedures. It is also guided by the season planning and operations decision matrix for making changes to the approved season plan activities and schedules.

3.96 The OMC standard operating procedure for station and field operations states that its role, as 'the primary focal point for the oversight of Field activities', includes the following:

- monitoring the delivery of significant operational activities in Antarctica, the sub-Antarctic and the Southern Ocean against the season, station, and project plans;
- undertaking analysis of weather, maritime, aviation, field information and geospatial data; and
- providing support for the prioritisation, coordination and de-confliction of key operational activities, including direct engagement with station, voyage and field leadership teams.

3.97 Each station and deployed field elements are responsible for providing daily situation reports (SITREPs) to the OMC. Daily SITREPs are examined at paragraphs 3.55 to 3.56. During the 2024–25 season, the OMC also received weekly status reporting on station infrastructure; received incident reports; coordinated revisions to travel arrangements; and received and assessed applications for changes to planned operations.⁴⁰

40 The OMC also participates in monthly meetings of the Antarctic Operations Committee, providing updates on season delivery.

Evaluations of individual season activities

3.98 The season plan states that the OMC will conduct 'After Activity Reviews (AARs)', including a 'post-season AAR'. The purpose of the AARs is to:

- a. Establish a short-term learning loop of observations and learnings for immediate resolution, to enhance the subsequent conduct of activities in this season, and
- b. Identify a longer-term learning loop of observations and learnings for formal evaluation and action in the Season AAR.

3.99 The department has not clearly established the role of AARs in the evaluation process. The season plan does not specify which activities will be subject to AARs or define how these are different from other reports required to be produced by field, voyage and traverse leaders (see paragraphs 3.55 to 3.58). On 3 March 2025, the department advised the ANAO that AARs were 'a new initiative introduced in the 2024–25 Season Plan', and that '[p]rocedures for the conduct of AARs are not yet developed or finalised'.

3.100 The department provided the ANAO a series of reports as evidence of 'AARs' conducted for activities delivered in the 2024–25 season. The format and content of reports produced varies for each activity and deliverable. These included four AARs produced using a 'standardised template' for the DMV, DTC, the MYIC and traverse; voyage reports for four voyages including the DMV; a field report for the DTC; and reports produced by station leaders outlining the activities supported at the station during the relevant season.

3.101 All reports described the season as wholly or partly successful. The DMV and DTC supported all planned science projects. The MYIC was impacted by delays to the traverse, but achieved the majority of objectives. The information reported in individual reports is summarised in Appendix 7.

3.102 The four standardised AARs for the DMV, DTC, MYIC and traverse outlined the objectives planned to be achieved for the season for the relevant activity, factors limiting the achievement of these objectives, recommendations for the next season and a table listing 'observations, insights and lessons learned'. The reports did not consistently assess whether the objectives listed were achieved, with the MYIC AAR commenting on the achievement of its objectives while the DMV, DTC and traverse AARs did not.

Recommendation no. 7

3.103 The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water establish an approach for the conduct of After Activity Reviews (AARs), including:

- (a) defining the types of activities or deliverables that are required to be evaluated, which should be commensurate with their importance to the delivery of the season;
- (b) outlining how and when to assess and document the achievement of outcomes or objectives of each activity or deliverable being evaluated;
- (c) determining how the AARs should inform whole-of-season evaluation; and
- (d) ensuring appropriate documentation of these arrangements as they are established.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water response: *Agreed.*

3.104 *Work on improving After Activity Reviews has commenced with the 2024–25 Antarctic season reviews of the Denman Terrestrial Campaign, Million Year Ice Core project and inland traverse capability.*

3.105 *Project evaluations have also been overseen by the AAD's Major Projects Board. The department welcomes the ANAO's recommendations on how the After Activity Reviews can be improved.*

Whole of season evaluation

3.106 Prior to the 2024–25 season, the department's post-season evaluation activities were limited to 'season debriefs' conducted with returning expeditioners, branches and sections, and there was no structured process to evaluate whether the season as a whole had delivered on its objectives.

3.107 A facilitated workshop to evaluate the 2024–25 season was held on 28 July 2025, attended by AAD branch heads and a subject matter expert from each branch.⁴¹ The season evaluation report was finalised on 5 September 2025. It stated that the 2024–25 season evaluation was 'structured to achieve two primary goals':

1. to review and discuss the extent to which the season achieved the objectives set out in the Season Plan; and
2. to set the foundations for evaluating the delivery of those objectives in future seasons, with a view to uplifting performance measurement capability.

3.108 The season evaluation report outlined the overall performance, success factors and learnings for the four main season deliverables: the DMV; traverse and MYIC; DTC; and 'stations and infrastructure'. The report does not specify what the overall objectives for the season were and whether they were achieved. The department's evaluation activities would be improved by

41 The workshop was facilitated by Konrad & Company. See AusTender, *Contract Notice View — CN4171755*, available from <https://www.tenders.gov.au/Cn/Show/d089d37e-ce3e-4a25-b221-6926deb732e5> [accessed 12 August 2025].

establishing clear objectives for the season at the outset, and ensuring that evaluation activities focus on assessing whether these objectives were achieved.⁴²

3.109 The season evaluation report includes five high-level recommendations to be taken forward, noting that '[f]urther work and consideration will be required to confirm specific actions following on the recommendations'. As outlined at paragraph 3.5, the department has not established a structured process to incorporate lessons learned into planning for future seasons. Ensuring an appropriate process is in place to capture and implement lessons learned will help inform key decisions relating to future policy and program design, including to highlight achievements and opportunities to strengthen performance, and improve efficiency and resource allocation.⁴³

Recommendation no. 8

3.110 The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water develop a process to: establish clear season objectives at the outset; evaluate the performance of completed seasons against those objectives; and capture and incorporate lessons learned in future planning.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water response: *Agreed.*

3.111 *The AAD is taking clear steps to better integrate its planning across multiple time horizons to provide a clear line of sight between government priorities and delivery of future Antarctic seasons.*

3.112 *The AAD recently conducted an evaluation for the delivery of the 2024–25 season to inform development of a process to evaluate achievement of season objectives for future seasons. This evaluation process will be further informed by the ANAO's findings.*

42 Australian Centre for Evaluation, Commonwealth Evaluation Toolkit, *How to evaluate: 2. Set evaluation objectives*, available from <https://evaluation.treasury.gov.au/toolkit/set-evaluation-objectives> [accessed 11 August 2025].

43 Australian Centre for Evaluation, Commonwealth Evaluation Toolkit, *Why evaluate*, available from <https://evaluation.treasury.gov.au/toolkit/why-evaluate> [accessed 2 July 2025].

4. Evaluation, monitoring and reporting

Areas examined

This chapter examines whether the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) is effectively evaluating, monitoring and reporting on its activities to determine whether the desired outcomes of the Australian Antarctic Program (the program) are being achieved.

Conclusion

The department is largely effective in evaluating, monitoring and reporting on whether program outcomes are being achieved. The Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan (strategy and action plan) outlines the objectives and outcomes to be pursued through the program. Although the department undertakes five-yearly reviews of its progress in implementing the strategy and action plan, it has not established arrangements to monitor progress in between these reviews. The department established three performance measures relating to its activities in Antarctica and in 2024–25 reported that it had achieved the targets set for all three. It undertakes public and non-public reporting on the program and its progress in implementing the strategy and action plan, and a project is planned to further improve its performance reporting.

4.1 The Commonwealth Evaluation Policy states that ‘Commonwealth entities and companies are expected to deliver support and services for Australians by setting clear objectives for major policies, projects and programs, and consistently measuring progress towards achieving these objectives’.⁴⁴ The Commonwealth Evaluation Toolkit states that entities should plan to conduct fit-for-purpose monitoring and evaluation activities before beginning any program or activity, identifying timeframes, resources, baseline data, and performance information.⁴⁵

Are there appropriate arrangements to monitor and evaluate the program?

The strategy and action plan outlines the objectives and outcomes to be pursued through the program. The department undertook a five-year review of the strategy and action plan in 2021 and has commenced planning for a ten-year review in 2026. The department does not monitor implementation of the commitments in the strategy and action plan in between the five-yearly reviews.

4.2 Broadly, the term ‘Australian Antarctic Program’ encompasses all elements of Australia’s activities in Antarctica, from scientific research through to logistics and infrastructure works. The AAD’s ‘strategic architecture’ (see Figure 2.2) outlines two key strategic planning documents establishing the intended outcomes of the department’s activities in Antarctica:

- the national interests outlined in the strategy and action plan — see paragraph 1.8; and

44 Australian Centre for Evaluation, *Commonwealth Evaluation Policy*, available from <https://evaluation.treasury.gov.au/about/commonwealth-evaluation-policy> [accessed 27 June 2025].

45 Australian Centre for Evaluation, *Commonwealth Evaluation Toolkit*, available from <https://evaluation.treasury.gov.au/toolkit/what-evaluation> [accessed 27 June 2025].

- Outcome 3 in the department's Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS) — reporting against the department's PBS Outcome 3 is examined further at paragraphs 4.20 to 4.25.

4.3 While the strategy and action plan is a whole-of-government document and involves contributions of other Commonwealth entities, the department through the AAD is 'responsible for leading, coordinating and delivering' the program and administering the Australian Antarctic Territory.

Monitoring delivery of the strategy and action plan

4.4 The strategy and action plan was launched on 27 April 2016. An interdepartmental committee (IDC) on the strategy and action plan was convened with relevant Commonwealth entities on 9 September 2016. Tables listing all commitments in the strategy and action plan were developed to assist in tracking their implementation.

4.5 The IDC agreed that the tables would be circulated biannually (January and July) for updating, and that an annual IDC meeting will be held in July each year. The tracking tables were updated in February 2017, August 2017, June 2018, July 2019 and April 2021. IDC meetings took place in August 2017, July 2018, August 2019 and June 2021. Records of meetings were partly complete.

4.6 The IDC was superseded by a 'Deputy Secretary Strategic Panel on Antarctic Affairs' (the panel), which met for the first time on 5 May 2022. It is co-chaired by the department and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and met on six occasions between 5 May 2022 and 10 July 2024. The purpose of the panel is to 'provide strategic coordination, guidance and long-term strategic views and perspectives to inform engagement and delivery of activities in Antarctica'.

4.7 On 30 June 2025 the department advised the ANAO that:

Tracking of implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan did not continue following establishment of the of the Deputy Secretary Strategic Panel on Antarctic Affairs.

4.8 The department advised the Minister for the Environment and Water in December 2024 that it would complete a stocktake of actions in the strategy and action plan in 2025. On 8 May 2025, the department advised the ANAO that the delivery of the strategy and action plan were being monitored through the AAD's 'annual and three year planning processes'. A 'Three Year Summary to June 2026' (three-year summary) was developed and launched in December 2024 (see paragraphs 2.76 to 2.82), outlining a list of commitments aligned to the strategy and action plan to be delivered to June 2026. A tracking table and a standard operating procedure for reporting on and updating the three-year summary are in draft as at October 2025. These were expected to be endorsed and circulated by the end of 2024–25.

Five-year review of the strategy and action plan

4.9 The strategy and action plan states that the government will conduct a five- and a 10-year review of progress against achieving the national Antarctic interests and delivering on the action plan.

4.10 In early 2021, the AAD created the Antarctic Strategy Review Taskforce (the taskforce) to commence the five-year review. Throughout March to June 2021, the taskforce consulted with

other Australian Government entities and internally on the progress in implementing the strategy and action plan, and in identifying the next steps to 2035.

4.11 The key findings and recommendations of the five-year review included the following.

- The strategy and action plan clearly articulates Australia's interests and sets out new priorities to deliver on these interests. The review found that there were significant additional activities that the government undertakes outside of those in the strategy and action plan and that subsequent updates to the strategy and action plan should clarify these additional activities which also contribute to upholding Australia's interests.
- After five years, the majority of actions (30 actions across 21 themes) have been met or are progressing well. Overall, the intent of the strategy and action plan is being met. Commitments from the first five years where implementation has not yet concluded will continue to be prioritised for delivery in the next five years.
- The 2016 strategy and action plan should be supplemented with an annex to the original strategy and action plan, focusing on the next five years (to 2026) and the next 10 to 20 years (2026–2036).
- An additional review should be conducted in 2026 to ensure that the national Antarctic interests still meet public accountability and support tangible actions likely to be achieved.

4.12 The draft review and a draft annex to the strategy and action plan were presented to the Minister for the Environment, who noted both documents on 6 July 2021.

Update to the strategy and action plan in 2022

4.13 Following the five-year review, an update to the strategy and action plan was announced by the Prime Minister and the Minister for the Environment on 22 February 2022.⁴⁶ The update provided a summary of progress achieved under the strategy and action plan between 2016 and 2021. It expanded on the 2016 strategy and action plan, listing 19 priority actions to be delivered in the five years to 2026 and eight actions to be delivered in the second decade (2026–2036). The update also listed 'significant ongoing activities' the Australian Government undertakes in addition to the planned actions, as recommended in the five-year review.

4.14 As outlined at paragraphs 4.7 to 4.8, the implementation of commitments in the strategy and action plan is not being specifically tracked, and delivery of the strategy and action plan is planned to be monitored through the AAD's three-year planning processes.

Ten-year review of the strategy and action plan

4.15 The department, together with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, has commenced planning for the 2026 review of the strategy and action plan. An internal AAD project plan for the 10-year review was approved by the Head of Division on 5 May 2025.

4.16 In June 2025, the department engaged Dr Tony Press to prepare an independent discussion paper to consider the extent to which recommendations of his 2014 report (which informed the development of the strategy and action plan in 2016) were addressed, and how future policy

⁴⁶ The updated strategy and action plan is available on the AAD's website: Australian Antarctic Program, *Australian Antarctic Strategy*, available from <https://www.antarctica.gov.au/about-us/strategy-and-plans/antarctic-strategy/> [accessed 30 June 2025].

settings could respond to a changed strategic landscape for Antarctica since the original strategy and action plan was developed.⁴⁷ The discussion paper is intended to inform the 10-year review and is due to be delivered to the department in December 2025.

4.17 The department advised the ANAO on 19 August 2025 that engagement with government is ongoing regarding the scope and timing of the 10-year review.

Is the department effectively reporting on whether the program is achieving its outcomes?

The department undertakes public and non-public reporting on the program and its progress in implementing the strategy and action plan. The department has three performance measures relating to its activities in Antarctica, which are compliant with the requirements of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014. It reported that in 2024–25 it achieved the targets set under each measure. The AAD is planning to undertake a project to improve its performance reporting and may benefit from considering whether it can better capture the breadth of its activities in Antarctica as described in its outcome.

Reporting under the Commonwealth performance framework

4.18 Commonwealth entities are subject to performance measurement and reporting requirements under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act), the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014 (PGPA Rule) and accompanying guidance issued by the Department of Finance. These are collectively referred to as the Commonwealth performance framework.

4.19 Under the framework, entities must publish corporate plans for each financial year. Corporate plans must set out the entity’s purpose and provide performance measures that will measure the entity’s performance in achieving its purpose. Results against these performance measures are required to be provided in the entity’s annual performance statements, to provide accountability information to the Parliament and the public.

4.20 The department’s activities in Antarctica fall under the PBS Outcome 3, which specifies one key activity and three performance measures that were established in 2023–24. Table 4.1 outlines the 2024–25 targets against the performance measures.

Table 4.1: Performance measures under Outcome 3: Antarctica

Outcome 3 performance measures
Outcome 3: Advance Australia’s environmental, scientific, strategic and economic interests in the Antarctic region by protecting, researching and administering in the region, including through international engagement.
Key activity 3.1: Contribute to Australia’s national Antarctic interests through science, environmental management and international engagement, including delivering Australia’s scientific research and operations in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean.

47 Dr Tony Press was head of the AAD from 1998–2009. Dr Press produced the 20 Year Australian Antarctic Strategy Plan report (the Press report) in 2014 which informed the development of the strategy and action plan in 2016.

Outcome 3 performance measures	
Measure	2024–25 Target
AN01: Deliver priority Antarctic science that advances Australia's interests	Publish 75 peer-reviewed journal articles
AN02: Improve our understanding of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean through mapping and charting	Improve the coverage and/or resolution and/or data domains across various maps and charts in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean
AN03: Conduct an annual deep-field activity to support Australia's national Antarctic interest	Conduct an annual deep-field activity to support the Australian Antarctic Program

Source: Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Corporate Plan 2024–25.

4.21 The department's annual performance statements were examined for the first time as part of the ANAO's performance statements audit program in 2024–25. The ANAO assessed the department's three Antarctica performance measures as appropriate; that is, they related directly to its purpose, were reliable and verifiable, free from bias, could be measured over time, and included targets against which to measure performance.

4.22 The department reported in 2023–24 and 2024–25 that the targets set under the three performance measures were met. Under AN03, the department reported on two deep field activities in both years: the Denman Terrestrial Campaign; and a traverse delivering cargo to support the Million Year Ice Core project.

4.23 On 15 October 2024 the AAD Division Management Committee endorsed a project aiming to improve the division's performance framework. The project plan states that the primary outcome of the project is to improve the AAD's performance framework in order to:

- Comply with requirements of the PGPA Act and PGPA Rule.
- Enable the Australian Antarctic Division to provide meaningful performance information to Parliament and the public via the department's Annual Performance Statements each year.
- Support the Australian Antarctic Division to advance its performance culture and manage its performance in contributing to achieving the department's purpose and Outcome 3: Antarctica.

4.24 As part of the project, there would be benefit in the department considering whether its performance measures are adequately capturing the breadth of its activities to deliver on Outcome 3. In addition to the activities covered by the three established performance measures, the outcome and key activity refer to other aspects of the department's activities in Antarctica including:

- environmental management;
- international engagement; and
- administering the Australian Antarctic Territory.

4.25 The explanatory text accompanying the key activity in the department's corporate plan additionally refers to the department's role in maintaining Australia's Antarctic stations.

Reporting to government

4.26 The department provides updates to government including on the progress in implementing the strategy and action plan, and an overview of broader strategic context of Australia’s presence in Antarctica. Key reports to the minister over the relevant period examined by the audit are outlined in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Key reports to minister on Antarctic activities

Date	Summary of contents
22 January 2018	Progress report on Year One (2016–17) and Year Two (2017–18) commitments of the strategy and action plan. The brief reported that ‘Overall, good progress has been made on Year One commitments and some Year Two commitments are already well underway’.
22 June 2021	For the minister to note the draft five-year review of the strategy and action plan, and the proposed draft update to the action plan.
22 November 2024	Outlined the strategic context for Antarctica and summarised budget proposals for the 2025–26 Federal Budget.

Source: ANAO summary of reporting to government.

Other public reporting

4.27 The department publishes news about its activities in Antarctica, particularly in relation to scientific research, on the Australian Antarctic Program’s website.⁴⁸

4.28 The department also reports to international stakeholders through the annual Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting. In 2024, it provided a progress update on initiatives under the strategy and action plan and in 2024 and 2025 it provided an update on the achievements of the Australian Antarctic Science Program.



Dr Caralee McLiesh PSM
Auditor-General

Canberra ACT
6 November 2025

48 Australian Antarctic Program, available from <https://www.antarctica.gov.au/> [accessed 15 July 2025].

Appendices

Appendix 1 Entity response



Australian Government
Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water

Mike Kaiser
Secretary

Our Ref: EC25-003556

Dr Caralee McLiesh PSM
Auditor-General
Australian National Audit Office
Office of the Auditor-General
officeoftheauditorgeneralperformanceaudit@anao.gov.au

Dear Dr McLeish

Thank you for your correspondence of 3 October 2025 seeking comment on the audit report for the performance audit of the *Australian Antarctic Program*. Pursuant to section 19 of the *Auditor-General Act 1997*, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) has prepared a response to the report (Appendix A).

The department is grateful for the way the audit was conducted. We were pleased with the constructive and collegiate engagement from the auditors and appreciate their dedication to understanding the context in which the Australian Antarctic Program is delivered.

The department agrees with the audit's eight recommendations which will build on the many improvements we have made to the Program's administration over the last two years, including the ongoing efforts of the division's leadership to refine its governance frameworks and improve season planning, as referenced in your report.

Antarctica is a dangerous and challenging place to work. Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of our staff, both expeditioners and head office staff, is of the utmost importance to me and the department. We have well established practices and procedures to identify and manage risks to our staff and infrastructure. The department welcomes the ANAO's feedback on how we can enhance our approach to risk, and better align and deliver safety standards, fatal risk controls and oversight.

I am a strong advocate for effective project management and delivery, and welcome the ANAO's advice on the need to establish a project management framework to guide the planning and delivery of the Australian Antarctic Program.

Please find enclosed with this letter the department's Summary Response (Appendix A) and editorial matters for your consideration (Appendix B).

Kind regards

Mike Kaiser
Secretary

28 October 2025

Encl. Department Response to the s19 Audit Report
Editorial matters for consideration

DCCEEW.gov.au

Appendix 2 Improvements observed by the ANAO

1. The existence of independent external audit, and the accompanying potential for scrutiny improves performance. Improvements in administrative and management practices usually occur: in anticipation of ANAO audit activity; during an audit engagement; as interim findings are made; and/or after the audit has been completed and formal findings are communicated.
2. The Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA) has encouraged the ANAO to consider ways in which the ANAO could capture and describe some of these impacts. The ANAO's corporate plan states that the ANAO's annual performance statements will provide a narrative that will consider, amongst other matters, analysis of key improvements made by entities during a performance audit process based on information included in tabled performance audit reports.
3. Performance audits involve close engagement between the ANAO and the audited entity as well as other stakeholders involved in the program or activity being audited. Throughout the audit engagement, the ANAO outlines to the entity the preliminary audit findings, conclusions and potential audit recommendations. This ensures that final recommendations are appropriately targeted and encourages entities to take early remedial action on any identified matters during the course of an audit. Remedial actions entities may take during the audit include:
 - strengthening governance arrangements;
 - introducing or revising policies, strategies, guidelines or administrative processes; and
 - initiating reviews or investigations.
4. In this context, the below action was observed by the ANAO during the course of the audit. It is not clear whether this action and/or the timing was planned in response to proposed or actual audit activity. The ANAO has not sought to obtain assurance over the source of this action or whether it has been appropriately implemented.
 - In May 2025, the department commenced developing a resource document for AAD staff to provide clarity around AAD's risk management systems and governance processes (see paragraph 2.31).

Appendix 3 Reviews and inquiries into the Australian Antarctic Division and the program

Name of review/inquiry	Review date	Reviewer	Purpose/scope of review	Summary of key findings
Australian Antarctic Science Program Governance Review (Clarke Review)	December 2017	Drew Clarke AO PSM FTSE	To advise on a governance model for the Australian Antarctic Science Program as currently administered by the AAD.	The current governance model supports collaborative science and education with economic benefits, but lacks coherence, leadership clarity, and scientific independence, and struggles with funding uncertainty, administrative inefficiencies, and balancing research and policy needs.
Maintaining Australia's national interests in Antarctica: Inquiry into Australia's Antarctic Territory	June 2018	Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories	An inquiry into the adequacy of Australia's infrastructure assets and capability in Antarctica.	Increased investment in infrastructure and science is vital to maintain leadership, modernise logistics, support research, and strengthen Hobart's role as an Antarctic gateway.
Leading Australian Antarctic Science: Review of Australian Antarctic Division Science Branch (O'Kane Review)	November 2021	Mary O'Kane	To review the 'quality, relevance and impact of the science conducted by the AAD's Science Branch', including the 'extent to which it delivered on government priorities' and outcomes, and any capability/resourcing gaps.	Overall, the review assessed the quality and impact of Science Branch's output as mixed, with much of the branch's science not regarded as addressing high priority Antarctic science questions and a lack of long-term consistent direction in the branch.
Review of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Australian Antarctic Program (Nash Review)	October 2022	Associate Professor Meredith Nash	To collect key information that can be used to inform the AAD's approach to diversity, inclusion, and equity into the future.	The study identified several areas in which the AAD's organisational culture required improvement and leaders were lacking in key people leadership skills.
Independent Review of Workplace Culture and Change at the Australian Antarctic Division (Russell Review)	March 2023	Russell Performance Co. (Leigh Russell)	To provide a comprehensive analysis of the division's culture, progress towards cultural change, and recommendations to build a foundation for cultural change over the months and years ahead.	The review revealed serious cultural and leadership issues, including harmful behaviours, lack of psychological safety, and inadequate support systems, with recommendations to improve diversity, inclusion, and workplace wellbeing.

Name of review/inquiry	Review date	Reviewer	Purpose/scope of review	Summary of key findings
Review of the Australian Antarctic science funding model	April 2023	Australian Antarctic Science Council	To conduct a review of the Australian Antarctic science funding model, in the context of the challenging operational environment, the decadal strategy under development and terminating funding arrangements.	The current funding model involves multiple funding streams and entities and performs poorly for coherence and certainty. The review recommended several options to enhance coherence, provide funding certainty, and improve excellence and impact.
Inquiry into Australian Antarctic Division funding	May 2024	Senate Environment and Communications References Committee	An inquiry into the current management of the funding of the AAD.	The committee found longstanding governance and funding issues at the AAD, including poor budget oversight, lack of strategic leadership and inadequate communication with staff. It recommended stronger accountability measures and prioritisation of and additional funding for Antarctic science projects.
Inquiry into the importance of Antarctica to Australia's national interests	February 2025	Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories	An inquiry into the importance of Antarctica to Australia's national interests.	The report highlighted Australia's critical strategic, scientific, environmental, and economic interests in the region, and made recommendations relating to Australia's relationship with the Antarctic Treaty System, supporting conservation and scientific research, and the beneficial position of Hobart as Australia's Antarctic Gateway.

Source: ANAO summary of reviews.

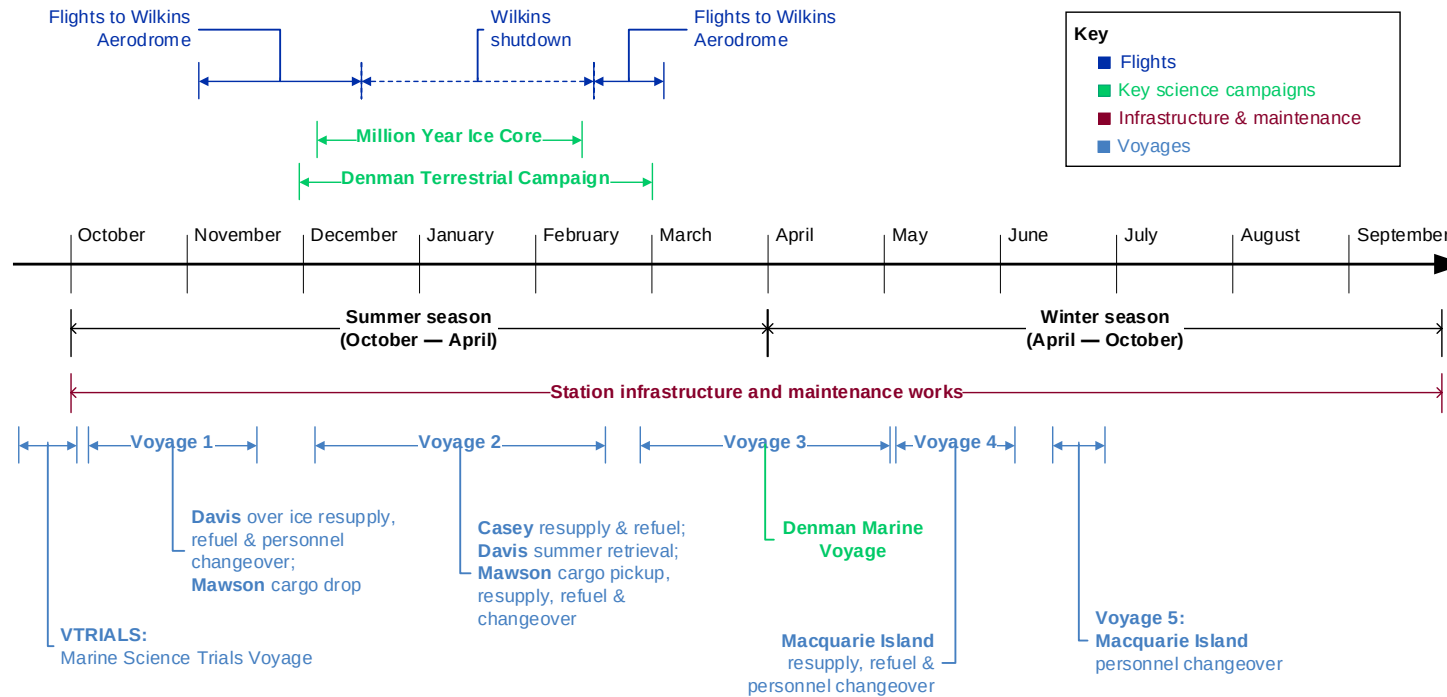
Appendix 4 Intercontinental flights for 2024–25 season

Date	Departure time	From	To	Aircraft
2 November 2024	07:08	Launceston	Wilkins Aerodrome	Airbus A319
	13:14	Wilkins Aerodrome	Launceston	Airbus A319
5 November 2024	06:51	Launceston	Wilkins Aerodrome	Airbus A319
	12:53	Wilkins Aerodrome	Launceston	Airbus A319
9 November 2024	09:01	Launceston	Wilkins Aerodrome	Airbus A319
	14:45	Wilkins Aerodrome	Launceston	Airbus A319
14 November 2024	06:53	Launceston	Wilkins Aerodrome	Airbus A319
	13:02	Wilkins Aerodrome	Launceston	Airbus A319
21 November 2024	11:28	Avalon	Wilkins Aerodrome	C17 Globemaster
	17:52	Wilkins Aerodrome	Avalon	C17 Globemaster
25 November 2024	10:58	Avalon	Wilkins Aerodrome	C17 Globemaster
	17:33	Wilkins Aerodrome	Avalon	C17 Globemaster
27 November 2024	06:59	Launceston	Wilkins Aerodrome	Airbus A319
	12:42	Wilkins Aerodrome	Launceston	Airbus A319
1 December 2024	06:46	Launceston	Wilkins Aerodrome	Airbus A319
	12:23	Wilkins Aerodrome	Launceston	Airbus A319
9 December 2024	08:30	Avalon	Wilkins Aerodrome	C17 Globemaster
	15:50	Wilkins Aerodrome	Avalon	C17 Globemaster
10 December 2024	11:48	Launceston	Wilkins Aerodrome	Airbus A319
	17:45	Wilkins Aerodrome	Launceston	Airbus A319
11 December 2024	07:00	Launceston	Wilkins Aerodrome	Airbus A319
	14:00	Wilkins Aerodrome	Launceston	Airbus A319
14 December 2024	07:00	Launceston	Wilkins Aerodrome	Airbus A319
	14:00	Wilkins Aerodrome	Launceston	Airbus A319
19 February 2025	08:46	Hobart	Wilkins Aerodrome	Airbus A319
	14:45	Wilkins Aerodrome	Hobart	Airbus A319
	16:30	Hobart	Wilkins Aerodrome	Airbus A319
	18:30	Wilkins Aerodrome	Hobart	Airbus A319
22 February 2025	02:00	Hobart	Wilkins Aerodrome	Airbus A319
	09:00	Wilkins Aerodrome	Hobart	Airbus A319

Date	Departure time	From	To	Aircraft
27 February 2025	07:00	Hobart	Wilkins Aerodrome	Airbus A319
	09:49	Hobart	Wilkins Aerodrome	Airbus A319
	14:00	Wilkins Aerodrome	Hobart	Airbus A319
	15:07	Wilkins Aerodrome	Hobart	Airbus A319
28 February 2025	07:13	Hobart	Wilkins Aerodrome	C17 Globemaster
	15:41	Wilkins Aerodrome	Hobart	C17 Globemaster
2 March 2025	08:11	Hobart	Wilkins Aerodrome	C17 Globemaster
	16:58	Wilkins Aerodrome	Hobart	C17 Globemaster
4 March 2025	07:04	Hobart	Wilkins Aerodrome	C17 Globemaster
	13:53	Wilkins Aerodrome	Hobart	C17 Globemaster
5 March 2025	06:08	Hobart	Wilkins Aerodrome	Airbus A319
	11:49	Wilkins Aerodrome	Hobart	Airbus A319
6 March 2025	07:00	Hobart	Wilkins Aerodrome	C17 Globemaster
	13:00	Wilkins Aerodrome	Hobart	C17 Globemaster

Source: ANAO summary of flights for 2024–25.

Appendix 5 Timeline of 2024–25 season



Source: ANAO representation from the department's records.

Appendix 6 Projects supported under key deliverables

Deliverable	Associated project(s)
Denman Terrestrial Campaign (DTC)	4620 — Towards a lighter touch: human impact assessments to support environmental stewardship
	4622 — A Cleaner Antarctica (Denman Terrestrial component)
	4628 — ARC SRIEAS SAEF ^a : Securing Antarctica's Environmental Future — An Evidence-Based, Informatics Approach (Denman terrestrial component)
	4629 — AAPP ^b : The stability of the Denman Ice Shelf System (Denman Terrestrial Component)
	4630 — Australian Centre for Excellence in Antarctic Science (ACEAS) (Denman Terrestrial Component)
	4633 — BEAUT — Biodiversity of East Antarctica: Underwater and Terrestrial
	5219 — Denman terrestrial campaign (Operations and logistics support)
Denman Marine Voyage (DMV)	4556 — Shaping the future use of environmental DNA (eDNA) in Southern Ocean ecosystem monitoring
	4628 — ARC SRIEAS SAEF ^a : Securing Antarctica's Environmental Future — An Evidence-Based, Informatics Approach (Denman marine component)
	4630 — Australian Centre for Excellence in Antarctic Science (ACEAS) (Denman marine component)
	4631 — Denman Marine
	4636 — Sustainable Management of Antarctic Krill and Conservation of the Krill-based Ecosystem
Million Year Ice Core (MYIC)	4632 — Million Year Ice Core
	5153 — Traverse Capability (Operations and logistics support)
Macquarie Island Critical Sustainment Works (CSW)	5226 — Macquarie Island Modernisation Project
Underway Capital Infrastructure Works	5220 — Davis/Casey/Mawson Capital works program 22–23/23–24
Station sustainment of Casey, Davis, Mawson and Macquarie Island	5223 — Antarctic Station Infrastructure Maintenance

Note a: The Australian Research Council (ARC) Special Research Initiative in Excellence in Antarctic Science (SRIEAS) aims to enhance Australia's research capacity in Antarctic science by supporting innovative and collaborative research projects. It funds the Securing Antarctica's Environmental Future (SAEF) program, which helped deliver the DTC and DMV. Australian Centre for Excellence in Antarctic Science (ACEAS) is also funded under the SRIEAS.

Note b: The Australian Antarctic Program Partnership (AAPP) is a partnership of Australia's leading Antarctic research institutions supported by the Australian Government Antarctic Science Collaboration Initiative.

Source: ANAO summary of projects being delivered under the key deliverables in 2024–25.

Appendix 7 Reporting on 2024–25 season deliverables

Season deliverable	Report format	Report date	Evaluation result
DMV	Voyage Report (Voyage 3)	7 May 2025	The voyage was a success and the voyage objectives were achieved in principle. Some targets for planned science activities were revised due to weather. On average, 94% of planned activities were completed.
	AAR	October 2025	Due to the observed poor weather and restrictions resulting from the withdrawal of a gear officer due to a medical reason, original deployment targets across the suite of planned activities were revised to approximately 70% of initially planned. The revised targets were met or exceeded in each case.
DTC	Field Report	March 2025	The season was 'highly successful'. Science operations were impacted by delays at the start of the season. Science projects partly achieved objectives and the field camp was fully remediated.
	DTC 2024–25 Aircraft Ground Support Officer Report	February 2025	Aviation operations for the season were efficient and effective, successfully deconstructing the field camp and returning all cargo to Casey Station in addition to the science achieved.
	AAR	June 2025	Achievement of objectives was impacted by delays early in the season.
MYIC	AAR	MYIC: June 2025	Five of six objectives were completed and one was partially completed. Achievement of science objectives was impacted by delays in traverse departure.
	AAR	Traverse: June 2025	Once delays at the start of the season were overcome, the remainder of the season either kept on track or exceeded the early season forecast.
Others	Station Annual or Summer Reports ^a	Casey: April 2025	The 2024–25 summer season at Casey station was an overall success.
		Davis: June 2025	Successfully delivered resupply activities, handovers, station set-up, field training, operational projects, and station maintenance.
		Mawson: N/A	Report not completed as at October 2025.
		Macquarie Island: N/A	Report not completed as at October 2025.

Season deliverable	Report format	Report date	Evaluation result
	Other Voyage Reports	Voyage 1: 19 November 2024	All voyage objectives were met.
		Voyage 2: 20 February 2025	All voyage objectives were materially met as defined in the Voyage Orders.
		Voyage 4: June 2025	Overall, the achievement of all high and medium priority project objectives during the resupply period was considered a success.

Note a: Annual reports cover the summer season and the previous winter. Where a station leader attends for summer only or summer first, a summer report is required.

Source: ANAO summary of AARs conducted for the 2024–25 season deliverables.