RAAF MAKES FINAL FLIGHT TO ANTARCTICA TO SUPPLY RESEARCHERS

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A trial using the Royal Australian Air Force to deliver heavy cargo to Australian researchers in East Antarctica has been hailed a resounding success as the final flight touched down on the ice.

The RAAF has flown five support missions with a C-17A Globemaster aircraft. The first left Hobart in late November.

The C-17A can carry up to 70 tonnes of cargo for over 10,000 kilometres but the load is limited to 20 tonnes on Antarctic flights so the aircraft does not need to refuel.

The cargo would have previously been delivered by ship in an operation taking weeks instead of days.

Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) director Dr Nick Gales said the concept flights proved the RAAF was a useful partner for the AAD.

"We were able to deliver a range of critical equipment to and from Antarctica including a 23 tonne

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tractor flown from Wilkins to Hobart for repairs with a turnaround of just over two months, compared to two years via ship," he said.

"Another piece of machinery was taken south just four weeks after it returned to Australia for repairs on the Aurora Australis."

He said the flights also highlighted the importance of Tasmania's role in Antarctic operations.

"That the flights to and from Wilkins Aerodrome flew return from Hobart Airport further demonstrates Tasmania's status as a leading gateway to Antarctica," he said.

RAAF director of air operations Air Commodore Joe Iervasi said the flights were also a huge success from his point of view.

"Royal Australian Air Force successfully moved over 109 tonnes of machinery and cargo both in and out of Antarctica, conducted an air drop of four heliboxes from 500 feet and simulated an emergency aeromedical evacuation," he said.

"The opportunity to test the C-17A in these conditions has proven to be an invaluable experience for the Royal Australian Air Force to enhance the capability of this aircraft and Australia's logistical and scientific capabilities in Antarctica."

Despite the positive feedback from both the AAD and the RAAF, there are no commitments to make similar flights in future, but the AAD said the results from the concept flights were being given due consideration.

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Antarctic Freight 1

The tagging, a dual-cab vehicle used for getting across snow and ice. (ABC News)

Air Freight 7

View from the RAAF cargo plane approaching the Antarctic. (ABC News)?

Antarctic Freight 4

The C-17A can carry up to 70 tonnes of cargo for over 10,000 kilometres. (ABC News)

Antarctic Freight 3

Ice vehicle being unloaded from RAAF plane. (ABC News)

ABC reporter Linda Hunt travelled on the first AAD-RAAF bulk cargo flight to the Antarctic. (ABC News)

?Antarctic Freight 2

?Antarctic Freight 5

A tractor unloads some of the plane's 20 tonnes of cargo. (ABC News)

?Antarctic Freight 9

Cargo door closed on the C-17A Globemaster, and ready for take off. (ABC News)

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Antarctic Flight 19
Inside the RAAF cargo plane on the way back to Hobart. (ABC News)

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