

# Australia icebreaker evacuates ill Antarctic worker

April 3 2015

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A seriously ill Antarctic worker returned to Australia on an icebreaker on Friday, which battled freezing temperatures and a seven-metre swell to bring him home.

The Aurora Australis docked in the southern city of Hobart, almost two weeks after evacuating the tradesman from Australia's Davis station.

"He will require ongoing medical treatment but we are very pleased he has travelled well over the past couple of weeks and his condition has not deteriorated," said Dr Jeff Ayton, the chief medical officer with the Australian Antarctic Division.

The sick worker has not been named and no details given of his illness, but Ayton said he was in a serious but stable condition and had been transferred to the Royal Hobart Hospital.

An emergency call to evacuate the man was made on March 19, prompting the Aurora Australis—which had left the station two days earlier—to turn back to rescue him.

The sick man had been intending to spend the upcoming southern hemisphere winter on Antarctica, and his evacuation via helicopter from the station to the ship posed a logistical challenge given the harsh weather conditions.

"The weather was snowing lightly and around minus 10 degrees but we

were able to pick a window between snow showers to get the patient into the helicopter and onto the ship," voyage leader Andy Cianchi said.

"Once we had the patient aboard it took us a couple of days to slowly break through the sea ice near Davis before finally making it out into the open Southern Ocean."

"The passage back was quite rough at times with wind gusts up to 60 knots, and a 6-7 metre swell causing the vessel to roll heavily," he added.

Ayton praised the telemedicine facilities—systems that allow medical care to be provided from a distance—which had helped make the transit a smooth one, and allowed for the ship's doctor to be in contact with experts almost 5,000 kilometres (3,100 miles) away in Australia.

"On the return journey home, across the inhospitable Southern Ocean, caring for the man was a challenge as the ship was a constant moving platform," he added.

The Aurora Australis will now be restocked and refuelled for the last voyage of the season to Macquarie Island on Monday.

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