Australian icebreaker runs aground in Antarctica
25 February 2016, by Martin Parry

A ferocious blizzard was Thursday hampering attempts to rescue 68 expeditioners and crew stranded on Australia's flagship icebreaker Aurora Australis after it broke its mooring and ran aground in frozen Antarctica.

The Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) said the incident happened on Wednesday when the ship was on a resupply mission to the Mawson Station, with gales of more than 130 kilometres per hour (80 miles per hour) whipping the base.

"A total of 68 expeditioners and crew are on board, and all remain safe and well," it said, adding that the icebreaker ran aground at West Arm in Horseshoe Harbour.

Australian Antarctic Division director Nick Gales said they would only be transferred the short distance to Mawson when conditions improved.

"They will remain on the ship until conditions ease and it's safe to move them over to Mawson Station," he said. "We're thinking that conditions are going to ease overnight."

The blizzard conditions have been hindering a full assessment of the ship but the division said there was a breach in the hull "into a space that is usually flooded with ballast water".

"This breach has occurred in an area of the ship that poses no risk to the stability of the vessel or of fuel leaking into the environment," it said.
The Aurora Australis was involved in a dramatic rescue of its own two years ago when it and Chinese icebreaker Xue Long were diverted to help Russian ship, the Akademik Shokalskiy, which was trapped in frozen Antarctic seas.

"We're in regular touch with the operators of the other national programs so we're looking at ship and aviation options. It's too early to say whether we need those options and secondly which of those will prove the most effective to get people home quickly," he said.

**Ageing vessel**

A Chinese Antarctic ship, Xiao Long, recently left Casey and is reportedly within a few days of Mawson.
replaced in 2019 by a new custom-built ship that will be faster, bigger and offer increased endurance.

Several countries have territorial claims on Antarctica, viewed as a potential future source of huge mineral resources, although under a 1959 agreement the frozen continent is designated a scientific preserve.

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