

Australian icebreaker heading home after Antarctica grounding

March 3 2016

Australia's flagship icebreaker was Thursday steaming back home with its crew after running aground in Antarctica during a blizzard, with experts saying damage to the hull was minor.

The Aurora Australis broke its mooring in a raging storm last Wednesday and became stuck on rocks at Horseshoe Harbour close to Australia's Mawson station, stranding 68 people on board.

The 37 expeditioners on the ship were rescued by barge on Friday and taken to Mawson, while the crew of the vessel owned by P&O Maritime Services stayed behind to refloat it.

The icebreaker was examined by external maritime experts over four days before being deemed seaworthy, the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) said, adding that the ship departed Mawson late Wednesday.

"The icebreaker's voyage back to Australia with P&O Maritime crew and two support staff from the Australian Antarctic Division on board is expected to take 11 days," the AAD added.

"The other expeditioners scheduled to return home with the ship will remain at Mawson research station for the time being.

"The Australian Antarctic Division has plans well in hand for returning expeditioners to Australia, and hopes to officially sign off on arrangements in the coming days."

The destination port for Aurora Australis, which has been battling the stormy Southern Ocean since 1989, will be determined by the availability of a shipyard where repairs can be made.

The Australian government agency added that the grounding "did not impact the propulsion or steering capability of the ship", with the icebreaker only sustaining minor structural damage to the hull.

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