

# Fire endangers Hobart's ice ship

By DAVID CARRIGG

AN engine-room fire has left the Hobart-based Antarctic research ship *Aurora Australis* without power in dangerous sea ice off the Antarctic coast.

None of the 79 people on board was injured in the blaze, which broke out early yesterday morning while the ship was in deep water 185km off the coast.

The extent of the damage is not known.

Australian Antarctic Division director Rex Moncur said the fire was extinguished by flooding the engine room with an inert gas.

The gas had to be cleared before crew wearing breathing apparatus could enter and assess the situation.

He said it could be some time before the extent of damage was known.

The 25 crew and 54 expeditioners, mostly from Hobart, would wear thermal clothing and stay below decks to keep warm.

"There is always a risk of becoming ice-bound in these waters at this time of the year but at this stage we don't expect to launch a rescue mission from Hobart," Mr Moncur said.

The ship was in regular radio contact with the Antarctic Div-



A file photo of the *Aurora Australis* in Antarctica.

ision's Hobart office.

He expected the expeditioners and crew to abandon the pioneering winter voyage and return the ship to Hobart for repairs in about a week.

The Antarctic Division, which hires the ship from P&O Australia, would not be hiring another vessel for the expedition.

"It's a pretty specialist vessel so you couldn't get the sort of research capability that this ship has got readily available," Mr Moncur said.

"We hope the next voyage can still proceed on schedule, which is early September."

The *Aurora Australis* is owned by P&O Australia and chartered by the Antarctic Div-

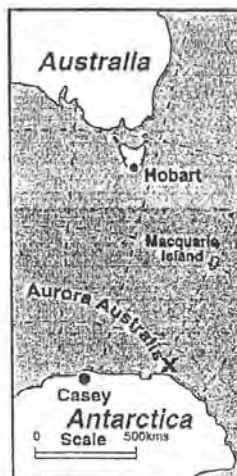
ision for about \$11 million a year.

P&O Australia managing director Richard Hein said yesterday the company was assessing the situation and a number of rescue options were being considered.

It was too early to say whether P&O would be liable for the cost of the aborted mission.

The vessel left Hobart last Wednesday for a seven-week voyage mainly to study a polynya, an area where savage winds break up the sea ice and cause heavy, salt-laden water to sink to the bottom.

The ship was nearing the polynya when the fire broke out.



Oceanographers believe a closer study of the phenomenon will lead to a better understanding of climate change.

CSIRO Marine Research oceanographer Steve Rintoul said the dense bottom water, created only in a few places in Antarctica and to a lesser extent in the North Atlantic, was critical to the chemistry and biology of the world's oceans.

## Fire strands Antarctic ship in sea ice

AN engine room fire has disabled the icebreaker *Aurora Australis* in sea ice, deep in Antarctic waters.

There were no injuries and the ship was not in danger after Tuesday night's fire.

Australian Antarctic Division director Mr Rex Moncur said. But Mr Moncur said he expected it would have to abandon its pioneering mid-winter voyage to the edge of the Ant-

arctic continent and return to Hobart for repairs.

The cause of the fire was not known but the engines have been turned off, with the ship 100 nautical miles from the Antarctic coast.

### THE CANBERRA TIMES

Thursday 23 July 1998

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## Antarctic voyage stopped by fire

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But Mr Moncur said he expected *Aurora Australis* would have to abandon its pioneering mid-winter voyage to the edge of the Antarctic continent to return to Hobart for repairs.

The fire had been extinguished and the engines were turned off, leaving the ship in sea ice about 100 nautical miles from the Antarctic coast, he said. The weather was good.

Crew had to wear breathing apparatus to enter the engine room and it was likely to be 24 hours before the damage could be fully assessed.

The *Aurora*, with 54 expeditioners and 25 crew, left Hobart last Wednesday for a seven-week voyage which was to have focused on a polynya, an area where savage winds break up the sea ice and cause heavy, salt-laden water to sink to the bottom.

Mr Moncur said, the cause of the fire was not yet known.

2:45 am July 22, 1998

"Please don't be alarmed but we have an uncontrolled fire in the engine room ...."

about 10 minutes later ...

"Please don't be alarmed but we're lowering the lifeboats ...."

*Sydney Morning Herald*  
23 July, 1998

### ICEBREAKER BURNS

A pioneering \$2-million Australian scientific voyage to the mid-winter Antarctic polynya is expected to be scrapped following an engine room fire on the *Aurora Australis* yesterday. The 54 people on board were forced on deck in the

