



Australian Government

Australian Maritime Safety Authority

## Media Release

6.30am AEDT Sunday 05 January 2014

### US Coast Guard ice breaker to assist ships beset in ice in Antarctica

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority's Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC Australia) has requested the US Coast Guard's *Polar Star* icebreaker to assist the vessels *MV Akademik Shokalskiy* and *Xue Long* which are beset by ice in Commonwealth Bay.

The US Coast Guard has accepted this request and will make *Polar Star* available to assist.

The *Polar Star* has been en route to Antarctica since 3 December, 2013 – weeks prior to the *MV Akademik Shokalskiy* being beset by ice in Commonwealth Bay. The intended mission of the *Polar Star* is to clear a navigable shipping channel in McMurdo Sound to the National Science Foundation's Scientific Research Station. Resupply ships use the channel to bring food, fuel and other goods to the station. The *Polar Star* will go on to undertake its mission once the search and rescue incident is resolved.

RCC Australia identified the *Polar Star* as a vessel capable of assisting the beset vessels following *MV Akademik Shokalskiy* being beset by ice overnight on 24 December, 2013. RCC Australia has been in discussion with the US Coast Guard this week to ascertain if the *Polar Star* was able to assist once it reaches Antarctica.

The request for the *Polar Star* to assist the beset vessels was made by RCC Australia to the US Coast Guard on 3 January, 2014. The US Coast Guard officially accepted this request and released the *Polar Star* to RCC Australia for search and rescue tasking at 8.30am on 4 January, 2014.

The *Polar Star* will leave Sydney today after taking on supplies prior to its voyage to Antarctica.

It is anticipated it will take approximately seven (7) days for the *Polar Star* to reach Commonwealth Bay, dependent on weather and ice conditions.

At 122 metres, the *Polar Star* is one of the largest ships in the US Coast Guard fleet. It has a range of 16,000 nautical miles at 18 knots. The *Polar Star* has a crew of 140 people.

The *Polar Star* is able to continuously break ice up to 1.8 metres (6ft) while travelling at three (3) knots and can break ice over six (21ft) metres thick.

RCC Australia will be in regular contact with the relevant US Coast Guard RCC at Alameda, California, and the Captain of the *Polar Star* during its journey to Antarctica.

**Media Enquiries:** 1300 624 633

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