



Australian Government

Australian Maritime Safety Authority

Media Release

1pm AEDT: 31st December 2013

Helicopter to rescue passengers from Russian vessel in Antarctica

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority's (AMSA) Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC Australia) was advised this morning by the *Aurora Australis* that the ship will not be able to reach the *MV Akademik Shokalskiy*.

The *Aurora Australis* advised RCC Australia it would be at risk of becoming beset by ice itself if it continued to make further rescue attempts.

The *Aurora Australis* made attempts yesterday to reach the *MV Akademik Shokalskiy* but was driven back into open waters due to adverse weather conditions such as winds up to 30 knots and snow showers resulting in poor visibility. The ship is currently located about 16 nautical miles east of the Russian vessel.

The helicopter on board the Chinese flagged vessel *Xue Long* will now be used to rescue the passengers from the *MV Akademik Shokalskiy*.

This rescue will be a complex operation involving a number of steps and subject to factors such as weather.

The helicopter is unable to fly in the current weather conditions, and will hold off on the rescue until conditions improve. Weather conditions are unlikely to start improving until tomorrow and decisions related to carrying out the rescue may be made at short notice.

In preparation for the rescue, an area for the helicopter to land has been marked on the ice near the *MV Akademik Shokalskiy*.

RCC Australia has been advised that all 52 passengers will leave the *MV Akademik Shokalskiy*. All 22 crew members are expected to remain with the vessel.

The passengers are expected to be rescued by helicopter in groups of 12 and will be initially transported to the *Xue Long*. The *Aurora Australis* will then use its barge to transfer all 52 passengers on board their vessel. The barge can take up to 22 people at a time.

RCC Australia continues to coordinate the incident and is in regular contact with all vessels involved and continues to monitor the situation. The vessels involved are also in close contact with each other via VHF radio.

The search and rescue operation commenced on Christmas morning AEDT after the Falmouth Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in the United Kingdom received a distress message via satellite from the *MV Akademik Shokalskiy*. The distress message and subsequent coordination of the incident was passed to RCC Australia, who is the responsible search and rescue authority for this area.