

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



International relations buoyed by marine recovery mission

A Japanese research vessel has gone out of its way to recover a \$1 million Australian marine research buoy that had been adrift in the Southern Ocean since becoming detached from its anchor three months ago.

The buoy is part of a deep-water mooring known as Southern Ocean Flux Station (SOFS), belonging to the Integrated Marine Observing System (IMOS) based at UTAS. The data collected informs important research being led by the Bureau of Meteorology.

SOFS was deployed to measure real-time meteorological and oceanographic conditions at the sea surface in the wild and remote Southern Ocean. It provides observations of heat and moisture exchange between the ocean and atmosphere, which are essential for understanding climate variability. There are very few observations from this area of the global ocean, and SOFS is a site of growing international significance.

The Mirai, a research vessel owned by the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology and operated by Global Ocean Development Inc., was in the Southern Ocean performing hydrographic surveys and agreed to attempt the recovery of SOFS3 on the way to its planned stopover in Hobart.

Despite adverse conditions, the Mirai crew and four technicians from Marine Works Japan Ltd under the leadership of the Chief Officer, successfully recovered SOFS with all sensors and instruments intact.

Dr Eric Schulz from the Bureau of Meteorology said that the Mirai is experienced in recovering large ocean moorings.

“The vessel has the required specialised equipment and personnel on board, making it suitable for the task,” he said.

“We were fortunate that the Mirai was able to assist us and we are very appreciative of its efforts in returning SOFS home. This is a great example of international coordination between Australia and Japan for the advancement of marine and climate research.”

SOFS had been moored at 47S, 142E approximately 350 nautical miles southwest of Tasmania in water more than 4.6 kilometres deep when the wire broke at a depth of around 1200 metres. Since September SOFS has drifted slowly 200 miles to the east, where it was recovered on a longitude equal to the west coast of Tasmania.

While drifting, the meteorological instruments have continued to collect observations and transmit data to the Bureau and to the IMOS Information Facility.

IMOS Director Mr Tim Moltmann said he was very relieved to know the buoy would be back in Hobart by the weekend.

“Taking observations in the Southern Ocean is vitally important, but it’s also a difficult business that doesn’t always go according to plan. With this buoy successfully recovered and all of the data secure, we’ve been able to turn a potential setback into a real success story.

“The cooperation of our Japanese colleagues has been crucial and we are extremely grateful for their help.”

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