



# Environmental Audit Sub-Committee on Polar Research

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Andrew Griffith MP

Minister for Science, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

*Sent by email only.*

16 May 2024

Dear Andrew,

Thank you very much for the time you dedicated to the discussion at my Committee's evidence session on 8 May in connection with our inquiry into *The UK and the Antarctic environment*. I regret that you were obliged to leave before the conclusion of the session, which was interrupted by votes in the Chamber. We would be grateful to have a written response to some further questions that have arisen from our inquiry, relating to UK science in Antarctica.

- 1) The Committee has heard that the British Antarctic Territory is a key region for understanding recent and future climate change in Antarctica. **What steps is the UK Government taking to support scientific research and infrastructure development in Antarctica?****
- 2) The British Antarctic Survey told us that ensuring consistent funding for infrastructure and logistics in Antarctica is essential for the smooth operation of research activities. **How does the Government plan to guarantee stable funding for Antarctic infrastructure and logistics, given the inherent challenges and costs associated with operating in the region?****
- 3) It has been repeatedly emphasised to us that it is a necessity for Antarctic science to receive significantly larger and more ambitious funding to sustain research endeavours spanning longer periods. This contrasts distinctly with the current funding allocated for Antarctic research projects. Scientists have informed us that NERC grants typically range from £1-3.5 million (excluding logistical costs), which they argue is inadequate for ambitious, long-term scientific projects. **How does the Government plan to address the need for larger-scale funding allocations with longer timescales to support major scientific initiatives and drive impactful research outcomes?****
- 4) Many scientists have stressed to us the key role of international collaboration in delivering scientific research in Antarctica, due to the scale of the logistical requirements of working in remote areas and extreme conditions. To better facilitate multilateral research projects in Antarctica, we have heard that there is a need for better mechanisms to minimise the risk of double jeopardy in funding – in this context this means that all international partners would have to be successfully funded for vital research to proceed. **How does the Government plan to address the disparity****

**between the internationally collaborative nature of scientific research in Antarctica and the predominantly nationally focused funding structures?**

**5) Given that the UK is spending £670 million on polar infrastructure modernisation at both poles, what mechanisms does the Government have in place to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of spending on scientific research and logistics in Antarctica?**

**6) The UK's investment in a new research ship, the RRS Sir David Attenborough, represents a substantial financial commitment. We heard during our inquiry that there has been inevitable tension caused by trying to schedule both Antarctic logistics support and marine science on the RRS Sir David Attenborough. What specific roles and capabilities would the Government like to see the ship fulfil? How can the use of the ship be maximised?**

**7) We heard that modern technology is becoming available and is changing science in Antarctica. How does the Government plan to ensure that scientists working in Antarctica have timely and straightforward access to new technological advancements, such as autonomous vehicles, sensors, and engineering equipment, considering the evolving nature of scientific research in the region?**

I would be most grateful for a response by 30 May.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, loopy initial 'J' followed by a smaller 'G' and a long, sweeping underline.

**James Gray MP**  
**Chair, Sub-Committee on Polar Research**