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MEDIA STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

New Zealand Defence Force in Antarctica

The New Zealand Defence Force is playing a significant role in the current offload of cargo which supplies a vital lifeline to McMurdo Station and Scott Base in Antarctica. The New Zealand Defence Force have supplied a 47-strong team, which includes drivers and movement operators who are on the Ice as part of Antarctica New Zealand's contribution to the joint US/NZ logistics pool. Combined with an additional group of 10 Engineers working on projects around McMurdo Station, and the existing Scott Base support team, this represents the largest-ever deployment to Antarctica by the New Zealand Defence Force.

The annual offload operation at McMurdo Station is an international collaboration. Besides the New Zealand Defence Force Offload team the operation involves cooperation from US Military Sealift Command, Swedish Maritime Administration and the US Navy.

The New Zealand Cargo Handlers and drivers have been arriving at McMurdo station from late January in preparation for the offload, acclimatising to the cold and familiarising themselves with the US vehicles and operations. Prior to their deployment to the Ice they completed an extensive training schedule, including briefings from Antarctica New Zealand, specific cold-weather medical training and crane refresher training.

The Swedish icebreaker *Oden* began work in December to break a channel through almost 29 km of ice that separates McMurdo Station from the open waters of the Ross Sea. This has allowed the fuel tanker *USNS Lawrence H. Gianella* access to the McMurdo Station Ice pier where 162 000 barrels of fuel for power generators and vehicles has been discharged. Within the week the Military Sealift Command dry cargo ship, *American Tern* will dock and to offload 29 000 tons of fresh supplies to sustain the scientists and support staff living at McMurdo Station and Scott Base. The Kiwi team will be in charge of driving and wharf operations and will work around the clock in the 24-hour daylight for the estimated 6-7 days that are required for cargo operations.

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Captain Paul Weatherston who leads the New Zealand Ship Offload Team said “The priority of the team is, firstly safety: ships and wharves can be hazardous places to work, particularly in high winds, reduced visibility and in the mountains of clothing you often have to wear down here. Second priority is the rapid and efficient completion of the ship offload and the distribution of the cargo to the correct locations. Many of the younger Movement Operators are in Antarctica for the first time, however the Movement Operations parent unit in Linton has a long history of assisting with operations down here. The Company Sergeant Major is now taking part in his 10th ship offload.”

CEO of Antarctica New Zealand Lou Sanson said “For fifty years New Zealand Defence has provided a key contribution to the New Zealand Antarctic programme. We look forward to their presence on the ice this summer season and their contribution is greatly appreciated by Antarctica New Zealand and the United States Antarctic Programme.”

Provided weather and Ice conditions cooperate the team are expected to have completed their task and be back in New Zealand by the 15 February.

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