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MEDIA STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

Spring signals the start of flights to Ice

The arrival of spring heralds the start of flights to Antarctica this week, following four months of total darkness and five months of isolation for New Zealand's winter-over team on the Ice.

The initial flight of this year's annual programme, known as SPRINGFLY, departs from Christchurch on Thursday. The US Antarctic Program (USAP), which is managed by the National Science Foundation, and Antarctica New Zealand are long-time partners through a co-operative logistical agreement that provides US Air Force C-17 Globemaster aircraft in support of the multi-national mission. The crews and personnel are part of a US Air Force-led joint task force conducting Operation Deep Freeze, which has supported the USAP and Antarctica NZ since 1955. As such, the flights this week will supply both the New Zealand and US Antarctic stations with scientific equipment, general supplies, fresh fruit and vegetables and mail. They will also deploy key personnel early for the upcoming summer research season, which begins in October.

Scott Base Winter Manager, Grant Hill, said the New Zealand winter-over team has had a great winter. "Antarctica New Zealand once again selected a fantastic winter crew with whom I am honoured to have wintered. The team has grown very close over the winter months and lifelong friendships have been formed," said Hill. The SPRINGFLY flight will see six of the winter team fly back to Christchurch. "It will be sad to see them go and our only consolation will be the arrival of 'freshies' (fresh fruit and vegetables), as well as an influx of new people," said Hill.

Antarctica New Zealand's Chief Executive, Lou Sanson, will also be on the flight south on Thursday. "The support of the US Air Force, NZDF and USAP is critical to our operation in Antarctica and it is a relationship that has endured over 50 years. Flying to the ice, particularly in the winter and early spring, is a vital link for our winter staff and the early science events that we support. It is the professionalism and skill of the defence personnel that make it all happen," said Sanson.

Mainbody flights, which mark the start of the summer season, begin on Tuesday 30 September.

Ends

T: +64 3 358 0200

F: +64 3 358 0211

International Antarctic Centre
Administration Building
38 Orchard Road
Private Bag 4745
Christchurch
New Zealand

www.antarcticanz.govt.nz



For more information please contact:

Matt Vance

Communications Advisor

Ph: +64 3 358 0213 (Direct)

Cell: +64 21 997 993

Email: m.vance@antarcticanz.govt.nz

T: +64 3 358 0200

F: +64 3 358 0211

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