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MEDIA STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

Spring signals the start of flights to the Ice

The arrival of spring heralds the start of flights to Antarctica this week, following four months of total darkness and six months of isolation for New Zealand's winter-over team on the Ice. The initial flight of this year's annual programme, known as WINFLY, 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.

Scott Base Winter Leader, Nathan Cross, 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. We have had 26 people on base this winter which has been one of our largest contingents ever," said Cross. "We are looking forward to the flight on Thursday as it will bring 'freshies' (fresh fruit and vegetables), new people and coincide with the first glimpse of the sun in 4 months," said Cross.

Antarctica New Zealand's Chief Executive, Lou Sanson, said. "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 for 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."

Mainbody flights, which mark the start of the summer season, are due to begin on Tuesday 29 September.

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