

SA Agulhas II docks in Cape Town

The SA Agulhas II returned to Cape Town last week after a successful relief voyage to Gough Island. The Gough 58 team, comprising 13 members and the first expedition team to have sailed with the new vessel after arriving in May 2012, spent 13 months on Gough Island.

"To the Scientific Community at large, your contribution to this meaningful cause in the research arena has not gone unnoticed. The trials for the eradication of mice from the island were done successfully. The continuous endeavour in the eradication of sagina alien plant is commended. A group of scientists were taken to Nightingale island where they will stay until December monitoring the seabirds and penguins on the island. On invitation from the Administrator of Tristan da Cunha, some of our scientists spent the relief period on Tristan to assist with research on the seals on Tristan." said Dr Monde Mayekiso, Deputy Director General: Oceans & Coasts, Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA).

The quality of South African weather forecasts relies heavily on the availability of data inputs from Gough Island region. The current data collection from Gough Island exceeds 55 years and is critical for an extremely data sparse region for climate studies and climate change projections.

Gough Island is a volcanic island rising from the South Atlantic Ocean to heights of over 900 meters above sea level with an area of 91km², with a variety of wildlife on and around the island. The base is built on land leased by South Africa from the British Government. The lease agreement was recently renewed for another 20 years when an extension was signed by the DEA's Director-General, Ms Nosipho Ngcaba and the British Consul General, Christopher Trott.

In terms of the agreement, South Africa will, among other things, transport a limited number of UK citizens and cargo on the SA Agulhas II, at a concessionary rate between Cape Town and Tristan da Cunha.

While en route from Gough Island, a British national, Karen Lavearello-Schreier, who was on board the vessel as part of the agreement between South Africa and the UK, fell ill and therefore needed medical treatment. The passenger was diagnosed with appendicitis and immediately received medical treatment from the medical team on board. She disembarked the vessel this morning and was taken to hospital where she is currently receiving treatment.