

Greetings to you all on the day of your departure on this most unusual relief voyage to Marion Island, Judy Beaumont here, Deputy DG of Oceans and Coasts to wish you well at the start of your voyage. I would like to start by acknowledging your commitment and determination in these extremely unusual and difficult circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. As you know, we had to get special permission for this relief voyage to proceed with the reduced crew and expedition team to deal with logistics, maintenance, and overwintering. Sadly, there will be no field science activities this time round. This was a very difficult decision to take, considering the global significance of the Marion Island scientific datasets that go back for three or four decades. So to all of you that made it possible to get us this far, I salute you the reduced Marion 77 expedition team, including scientists from the Southern African Weather Services and the South African National Space Agency to the team from the National Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, to the Departmental Coordinating Team with the Departmental Coordinating Officer, Mr. Sharon Watson, who worked tirelessly during the quarantine period, his assistant Mr. Mamby who will also oversee the technical work and Mr Samani, the waste technician for the voyage, to the medical doctor, Dr Donna McTaggart, the Ultimate Heli crew, the AMSOL crew and the teams that assisted in the packing, sanitizing and loading, including a team from working on fire. Thank you for making it possible to get us to this point.

The two weeks of quarantine and isolation has been extremely difficult on all of you. And again, I want to appreciate your patience and cooperation in seeing it through. We had to get expert advice on the procedures to be followed and we're working in a situation of limited and changing information on how best to ensure that the team would be safe and free of the virus in the lead up to departure and for the duration of the voyage. I had knots of anxiety in my stomach awaiting your test results and we were all so relieved to receive the wonderful news of 100% negative test results. Everyone free of the virus. I want to send a special farewell to the five amazing Marion 77 expedition members who for the first time in this, in the history of the program are experiencing a different, unexpected and never been done before kind of voyage.

Thank you so much for grabbing the bull by its horns, without hesitation and tackling this challenge, head on. I'm equally grateful to your family, friends, and loved ones for allowing you to serve the nation even during these trying times in absentia. please convey my heartfelt gratitude to them. Please also convey my heartfelt gratitude to the Marion 76 those returning and also those that heeded the call to remain behind their sacrifice, generosity and display of the love they have for the program is visible to all. Another big thank you goes to the AMSOL team for all the hard work from the day the passengers started quarantine. It was not an easy journey, but you tolerated our endless requests that resulted in sleepless nights and long days, running around during lockdown to source supplies. I'm also grateful for your help in availing personnel who will assist in waste management and other duties to the DEFF team behind the scenes, thank you. You have found your way over or around the many stumbling blocks in our way. Let me end by saying I look forward to seeing you on your return from the relief voyage and expedition when the COVID-19 storm has abated. Until then I call upon you to continue practicing social distancing and safety precautions at all times. Wash your hands, sanitize over and over where your gloves and masks and practice social distancing. It's not over until it's over. Safe sailing and everything of the best in your different spheres of work!