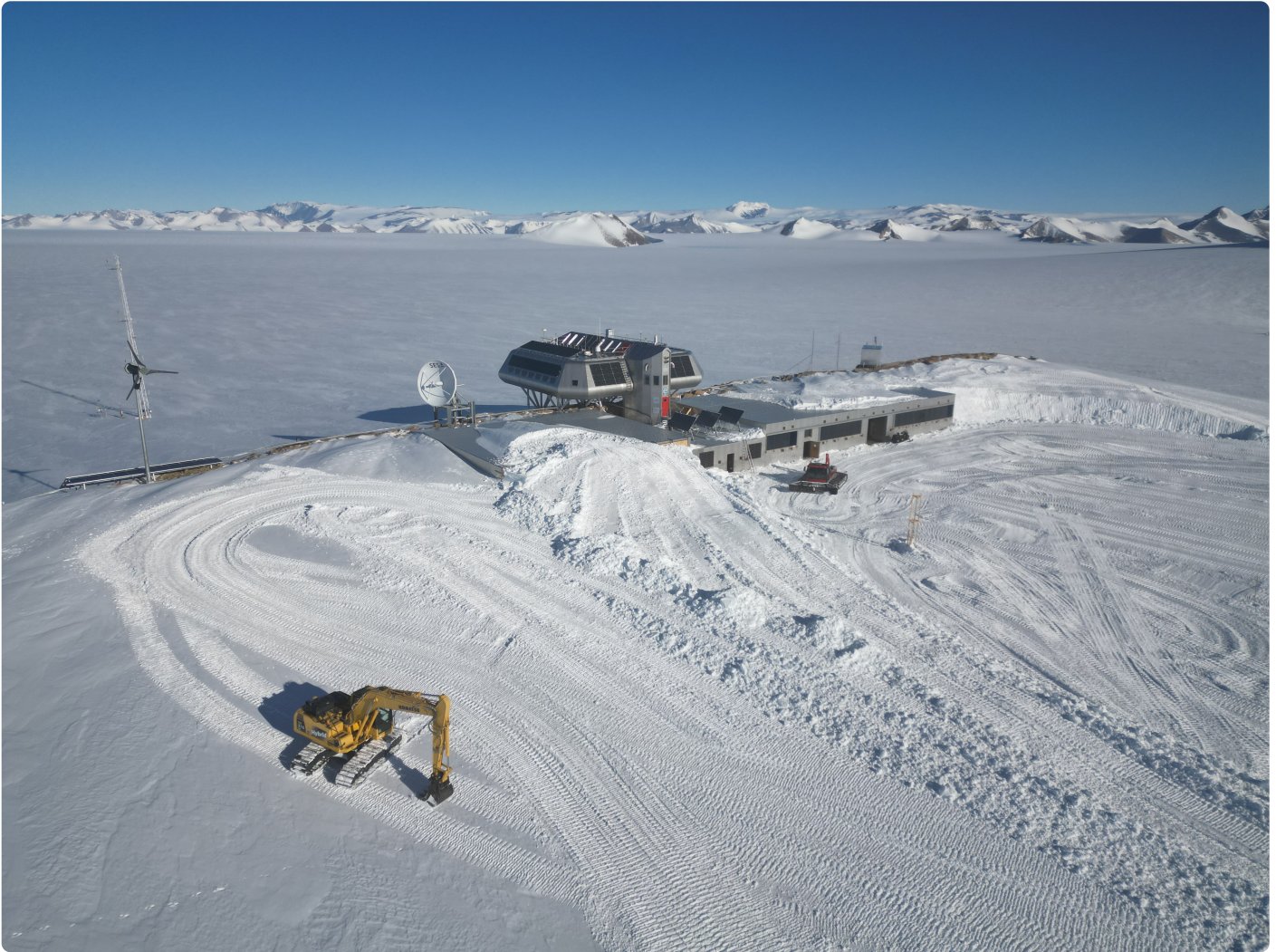


PRINCESS ELISABETH STATION AWAKENS FROM ITS WINTER SLUMBER TO WELCOME BACK THE BELARE TEAM



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After spending eight months uninhabited but controlled remotely, the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica finally welcomed the first fourteen team members of the BELARE 2025-26 team, who arrived on Wednesday, November 12th to open the station. As the station's airstrip was ungroomed, the first aircraft of the season had to be as light as possible, so the remaining five team members of the lead team waited patiently at Ultima Airbase with most of the cargo, scientific equipment and food supply until the feeder plane could return to pick them up the following day.

During the austral winter, the station goes into winter mode: energy consumption drops to an absolute minimum since no one is inside using electricity, heat, or water. But the station doesn't freeze because its interior temperature is kept safely above freezing throughout the long winter months thanks to the station's intelligent design. A few days before the first team arrives, some of the station's systems are already turned on so the lead team can arrive at a warmed-up station. Once the team is finally on-site, all systems are brought back online one by one as the station shifts to summer mode.

And then real work begins! The first big task every season is the same: clearing snow and ice from around the station. This year, our four Prinoth tractor and excavator drivers worked three full days to push away all the snow accumulated in front of the station's annexes, helped by surprisingly mild weather for Antarctica at this time of year: a balmy -10°C with no wind at all! Up to seven metres of snow had to be removed from in front of the station's annexes' doors and garages.

The team levelled the terrace in front of the station's annexes using a laser level to precisely guide them. The terrace needs to be perfectly flat so vehicles can circulate freely. This is also where the waste-storage containers will be placed during the season before everything is shipped out for proper disposal on the ship that will arrive later in the season. Part of the terrace is also dedicated for parking of vehicles used during the summer months (skidoos, hiluxes, Prinoth tractors etc) along with scientific laboratories and mobile living units used in the field.

Because the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica is the only zero-emission station on the frozen continent, freeing the solar panels from protective overwintering boards is a top priority. With the sun now shining almost continuously, every single panel contributes to bringing the station back to full power.

The station's signature water treatment system also had to be switched from winter to summer mode - a smooth task thanks to the efforts of the plumbers and engineers of our team. On the second day, fresh water from the snow melter was already flowing to the kitchen; on the third day, the bathrooms started receiving water. In the next few days the bioreactors were started so wastewater - which had been stored in large interim tanks - could finally be processed.

Check the photo gallery and our social media channels to see the latest photos and videos!

Stay tuned: Next week we'll share how the team is starting work on scientific projects!