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Media Release

International Antarctic Centre invests over \$4 million into South Island tourism

The Christchurch International Antarctic Centre will invest in excess of \$4 million this year with the purchase of the Hukawai Glacier Centre at Franz Josef and the opening of a new 4D theatre concept at The Antarctic Centre in Christchurch.

The indoor attraction and retail section of the Hukawai Glacier Centre reopened on Saturday under the new management, but the Antarctic 4D theatre in Christchurch will not be ready until November once construction of the 50-seat capacity building has been completed.

Richard Benton, director of the International Antarctic Centre, said that while many are only now just grappling with 3D after the success of movies such as *Avatar*, the Antarctic Centre will go a step further when it introduces 4D.

“4D is all about watching movies in 3D, but with the additional benefit of involving your other senses such as touch and smell. You can feel the air, the water and the special effects that are all part of the overall sensory experience - seats vibrate and move, snow bubbles and dry ice appear all around you and just so much more,” he said.

The Antarctic Centre has already commissioned world-renowned cinematographer Mike Single, who has recently completed filming in 3D in Antarctica for the new theatre experience. The 4D theatre concept has been exclusively purchased out of the United Kingdom.

Building work on the new theatre, which is being constructed in partnership with the Christchurch International Airport, will start in June this year.

“With these two investments we are taking something of a counter-cyclical approach, looking to invest when the tourism market is tough in anticipation of the better times ahead.

“With the Glacier Centre we see huge potential in the Franz Josef area, especially when you consider the substantial investment that has already been made in hotels and infrastructure there. The centre is a unique and impressive building and it dovetails nicely with our tourism set up in Christchurch. It also means that we can utilise all our international market connections to drive more visitors into the South Westland region.

“We have a host of fresh ideas for the attraction, and are currently consulting widely to see what would work well for the region. We have purchased the land, building and exhibit fit out and we will be working hard over the winter period to add some exciting new developments for the summer season,” he said.

The Glacier Centre (previously known as Hukawai), which opened in March 2007, was placed in receivership in July 2009 by the main financier, Development West Coast, after the independently owned and operated business had unsuccessfully struggled to reach a point of financial viability.

Chief Executive Dr John Chang said that while it was disappointing to have to call in the receivers, gaining the support of such a well respected and run organisation as the International Antarctic Centre can only bode well for the future.

“Development West Coast was established to promote employment and generate sustainable economic benefits on the West Coast. When you couple the expertise of the world renowned International Antarctic Centre with the

wonders of South Westland and Mr Benton's plans for the Glacier Centre then you cannot but be excited at the economic impact this venture will have on the area.

"We believe the purchase of this facility by the Antarctic Centre will have many benefits, not only to Franz Josef and the Westland District, but to the wider West Coast region. The Antarctic Centre brings with it a proven track record of providing quality products and services that are of international standard.

"Having an attraction to the standard of the International Antarctic Centre located on the West Coast would create an exceptional draw card for visitors to our region, and this is strengthened with the ability for the Christchurch operation to act as an agent for the West Coast operation and refer customers on," he said.

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