

Coast Guard's sole heavy icebreaker returns home following Antarctic deployment



U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star (WAGB 10) returns to Coast Guard Base Seattle following a 146-day Antarctic deployment in support of Operation Deep Freeze, April 13, 2026. The Polar Star is the United States' only surface asset capable of providing year-round access to both Polar Regions. It is a 399-foot heavy polar icebreaker commissioned in 1976, weighing 13,500 tons and is 84 feet wide with a 34-foot draft. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Briana Carter)
From U.S. Coast Guard Northwest District, April 20, 2026

SEATTLE – The crew aboard the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star (WAGB 10) returned home to Seattle on April 13, following a 146-day Antarctic deployment in support of Operation Deep

Freeze (ODF) 2026.

Polar Star departed Seattle Nov. 20, traveling more than 20,000 nautical miles through ocean and ice to complete ODF 2026. ODF is the logistical support provided by the Department of War to the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF)-managed U.S. Antarctic Program (USAP).

While spending 62 days in Antarctic waters, Polar Star conducted multiple mission sets before departing the Antarctic region on March 8. The cutter established a seven-mile-long channel through fast ice up to eight feet thick and escorted a fuel tanker and container vessel through the ice in McMurdo Sound in order to resupply McMurdo Station. Polar Star also escorted a tug with the 330-foot-long NSF Discovery Pier for install at McMurdo Station to provide a semi-permanent means to moor ships for the USAP.

Polar Star supported the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) by completing sighting reports of fishing vessels in the Ross Sea. Through monitoring and documenting fishing activity, the crew helped ensure compliance with established regulations, protecting marine resources and U.S. interests in one of the world's most remote and scientifically significant regions.

“Coming back to Seattle following deployment for the first time in a few years means a lot, especially considering how we spend over 300 days away from homeport each year,” said Rasnake. “So, we’ll enjoy the warm embrace of friends and family for a minute before quickly getting back after the hard work of maintaining this cutter and getting it ready for next year’s mission.”

While transiting home, Polar Star’s crew made port calls in Hobart, Australia and Wellington, New Zealand. While in Hobart, Polar Star hosted international visitors from CCAMLR, Australian Armed Forces and Australian Government, including

the commanding officer of Navy Headquarters Tasmania.

In Wellington, the U.S. Embassy hosted a reception aboard Polar Star, where David Gehrenbeck, U.S. Chargé d’Affaires to New Zealand, hosted 40 distinguished guests, including, the Honorable Judith Collins, the 43rd Minister of Defence. Other guests and Embassy representatives from over ten different countries joined Polar Star’s crew members to acknowledge the U.S. and New Zealand’s joint support of the Antarctic Treaty and celebrate Polar Star’s first visit to Wellington since December 2021.

Commissioned on Jan. 17, 1976, Polar Star is the nation’s only active heavy icebreaker and has served as a cornerstone of U.S. presence in the polar regions. For five decades, the cutter has executed missions ranging from Antarctic resupply and search and rescue to environmental protection and national defense.

“Polar Star reminded us of her age on more than one occasion this deployment, but as always, this crew demonstrated the cutter’s unique capability by working together through each challenge and finding a way to get the job done,” said Capt. Jeff Rasnake, Polar Star’s commanding officer.

Polar Star will be completing its annual dry dock maintenance over the summer, ensuring it is ready to meet all mission requirements for ODF27. The critical work completed during these periods ensures that U.S. maintains year-round access to the high latitudes.