

A NO FOR THE MARION ISLAND RUNWAY

The proposal to build an emergency landing facility for fixed-wing aeroplanes at sub-Antarctic Marion Island (Cooper 1987) has been turned down, to the great relief of all concerned. After a thorough environmental impact assessment (Heymann et al. 1987), which came out strongly against the proposal for both environmental and economic reasons, the South African Minister of Environment Affairs announced that the project would not go ahead.

The African Seabird Group conducted an awareness campaign on the issue, requesting over a hundred individuals and non-governmental organizations around the world to express their concern to the EIA panel. The panel's report lists, in an appendix by name and address, 63 such concerned individuals and NGOs who wrote in by 13 April 1987, unsolicited by the panel, and states that in all submissions the proposal was strongly condemned. The ASG received copies of more than half the submissions and I am pleased to say that, with only one exception, they were all temperate and well-argued. Irrational and intemperate words would not have helped the panel in its deliberations.

Not surprisingly, human nature being what it is, the good news has received less publicity than has the original bad news of the proposal. However, thanks should be made where they are due, and I hope that many of the respondents to the ASG appeal have written or will write again, expressing their approval of the decision made.

The EIA panel's report is a most valuable document that all interested in the conservation of sub-Antarctic islands should have and use. It can be obtained free on request from the office of the Director General, Department of Environment Affairs, Pvt Bag X447, Pretoria 0001, South Africa. The next issue of *Cormorant* will contain a review of the report.

Hard on the heels of the end of the Marion runway proposal come the news, or at least rumours, of Australian plans to build a hard-rock runway on the Antarctic mainland near Davis in the Vestfold Hills. Tourist facilities have also been mooted. However, a communication to the ASG from the Acting Director of The Australian Antarctic Division suggests that fears are unfounded and that no firm proposals presently exist for a runway. Whatever the case, concerned "down southerners" should continue to monitor the situation.

All such major development plans in the sub-Antarctic and Antarctica should be assessed by EIA procedures. The recent South African activity has helped show the way.

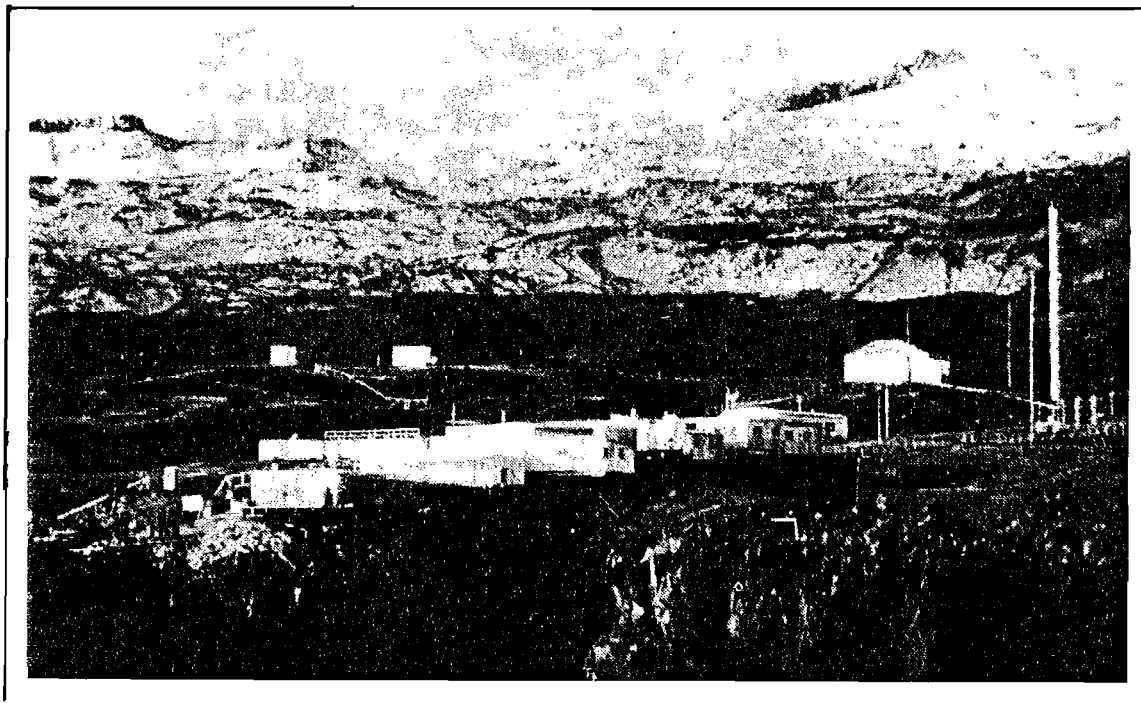
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Photographed by C.R. Brown