

■ EXPEDITION

Science team sets sail for Gough Island visit

SUKAINA ISHMAIL
sukaina.ishmail@inl.co.za

THE Gough 65 expedition team departed yesterday aboard the SA Agulhas II ship for their annual visit to Gough Island in the South Atlantic Ocean.

The team will be on the volcanic island for 14 months during which they will test a hut made from invasive plants.

The island is also home to one of the major weather stations that South Africa relies on for the initial measurements that lead to our weather forecasts.

The hut will be used as shelter by those working at the weather station.

The deputy director-general of environmental programmes at the Department of Environmental Affairs, Guy Preston, who is leading the team, said: “Our aim was to test the building materials made from alien invasive plants, since these plants are a big problem in terms of our water security, fires, erosion and the displacement of our native biodiversity.”

The materials are made of a wood-plastic composite, poplar and gum wood, which is 75% invasive biomass and 25% virgin and recycled plastic.

The same waste materials can be used in the future to build more homes while saving resources.

There will be 17 members from the Department of Public Works doing maintenance, 10 researchers and five members constructing the hut.

The weather station has been operating on the island since 1956.

The department’s deputy director-general for oceans and coast, Judy Beaumont, said: “Gough Island is important particularly because the location of the weather station that

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Guy Preston
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

helps us understand how the southern ocean is impacting our weather and climate.”

Beaumont said it was hoped the weather station, too, could be rebuilt with the new waste materials.

The team will be joined by members of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, who will undertake a multimillion-rand habitat restoration project to eradicate invasive mice from Gough Island in 2020.