



Centre for Antimatter-Matter Studies
Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence



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Re: Personal submission to The Australian Research Council Amendment (Ensuring Research Independence) Bill 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

My background: I have been an academic within Australia for around forty years, and currently lead the Department of Physics and Astronomy at Curtin University. Throughout this time, I have enjoyed continuous funding from the ARC, which includes five Fellowships spanning 23 years. My work is fundamental Quantum Collision Physics, which has many practical applications in science and industry. Accordingly, we have also received funding directly from industry and via the ARC Linkage projects. Lastly, I have worked on the ARC selection panels for seven years.

The recent focus on Ministerial vetoing of a few grants in the humanities has created a needless lose-lose situation for us all. The biggest tragedy is not the vetoing of the grants, but the loss of focus on the fact of how many deserving grants, many with commercial possibilities, have missed out due to too little funding in the system. In my first year working for the ARC, the CEO asked me enthusiastically about my experience. My response was "heartbreaking", because I was responsible for ending the research careers of many outstanding young people so that at most 20% of others could have an opportunity to succeed. So, from my point of view the biggest tragedy is that a further 10% to 20% of applicants who were worthy of funding, but missed out, much more so than the 0.01% of the funding that was removed by the Minister.

The second tragedy is the logistical nightmare that the Ministerial vetoing process creates. Research is very much like starting a new business, it needs to be timely to be successful. We all know most new businesses fail, and most research does not succeed the way it was

anticipated, though much useful knowledge is gained along the way. Creating massive time delays, as happened recently, only adds considerably to the problem. So, I support the removal of Ministerial vetoing power solely on the basis of the logistical problems it creates for the entire 100% of the research community waiting for the outcomes of the submissions to the ARC.

Having been on the inside of the ARC for seven years there are many problems that deserve attention. For example, the claim that its administration is some of the cheapest in the world is the wrong metric. A better metric would be to consider the entire cost that includes all of the applicants for whom, due to too little funding, 80% of their collective time and energy is being mostly wasted.

Being a scientist, I have no opinion on the content of the vetoed proposals in the humanities. However, this is much more about having a robust due process, without anecdotal external interference that depends on the Minister of the day. Accordingly, I urge the inquiry to recommend removing the Ministerial veto, and suggest that the Minister focusses on the positive aspect of increasing the investment in Australian researchers who drive the country forward.

Yours faithfully,

Prof. Igor Bray