



Submission to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation
Committee

**Inquiry into the Australian Research Council Amendment (Ensuring
Research Independence) Bill 2018**

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To the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into the Australian Research Council Amendment (Ensuring Research Independence) Bill 2018.

The Statistical Society of Australia is Australia's professional society for statisticians, data scientists, and all professionals with an interest in data. We represent over 1000 statisticians and data scientists from across Australia. The overall objective of the Society is to further the study, application and good practice of statistical theory and methods in all branches of learning and enterprise. The majority of our members work in the academic sector, in Australian universities and research institutes. Many of our members interact with the Australian Research Council (ARC) in a number of ways: applying for and receiving grants through the ARC, acting as expert reviewers of grant proposals, and, from time to time, through membership of the ARC's College of Experts.

The Statistical Society of Australia recommends that Australian Research Council Amendment (Ensuring Research Independence) Bill 2018 be accepted.

This Bill will ensure the independence of research funded by the ARC, by removing the rights of the Minister to veto grants recommended for funding by the ARC, and to reduce the amount of funding recommended by the ARC. Such changes will help to ensure the independence of research in Australia from the government of the day, while still maintaining the highest levels of rigour and integrity as encoded in the ARC's grant assessment process.

Grants recommended by the ARC for funding have been through a rigorous peer review process; only proposals of the highest merit are recommended for funding. Each proposal is scrutinised by experts in the area of that proposal from across the world, as well as by the ARC's College of Experts. These expert assessors are carefully selected to ensure that they have expertise in the areas of the grants they assess; no single expert has expertise in all fields of research. A provision for Ministerial veto of grants undermines the entire peer review process of the ARC. Such veto allows for non-expert opinion to prevent funding of those grants judged as worthy of funding by experts.

Further, the proposed budgets of grants are scrutinised by these same experts, and are often reduced to ensure cost-effectiveness. Grants recommended for funding have been judged to be of the highest academic merit, and also value for money. The right of the Minister to further reduce the recommended levels of funding must be removed.

Allowance for Ministerial veto implies expertise of the Minister in all areas of research, but no single person can be an expert in the broad range of research recommended for funding by the ARC. Review of grants by appropriately qualified experts is the cornerstone of the ARC assessment process. The grants recommended for funding by



the ARC have been assessed by experts from around Australia and across the world as being of the highest quality and as being value for money. It is the view of the Statistical Society of Australia that ensuring support of such meritorious research is in Australia's national interest. Thus, the Statistical Society of Australia recommends that Ministerial veto powers be removed from the Australian Research Council Bill, and the Australian Research Council Amendment (Ensuring Research Independence) Bill 2018 be accepted.

Yours sincerely,

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