

Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Sir / Madam,

I have recently returned from a visit to Europe only to discover the period for submissions to the Inquiry into the provisions of the ARC Amendment Bill 2006 has closed. I will therefore make my comments brief, but hope that they may be taken into account in your drafting.

Under the provisions of the current Bill, it is not possible for Australian researchers to be funded by the ARC to participate in international research projects that are peer reviewed and approved outside Australia. This is having a significant impact on our ability to compete in the rapidly internationalising world of science.

An example of the current situation will illustrate the practical difficulties. A leading Australian research team is invited to participate in a bid for say European Union "6th Framework Programme" funding (of the order of 20 million euros per project). They must write an application to the EU together with their European partners, which is then evaluated by an international panel of their peers, before being ranked for possible funding. They must also write a completely separate application not involving their European partners, with different deadlines and often different goals, to the Australian Research Council, for another round of peer review. The outcome is often that one of the applications is approved and the other is not, leading to enormous embarrassment and loss of trust between the Australian team and their European counterparts. The situation is mirrored in joint research projects with almost every other country.

For Australia such situations have lead to our effective elimination from many international research programmes, simply because of our inability to use the research funds allocated in Australia to lever significant amounts of international funds. Within the EU 5th Framework Programme, for example, Australians participated in projects worth over 400 million euros. However, leading international teams in several countries I have visited are now reluctant to engage with Australian researchers because the difficulties here may impact on their ability to win grants in their own countries.

Australia already has a very sound model that could be used to redress this situation: the NH&MRC has established a scheme that relies on only one international peer review process for Australian teams wanting to participate with their colleagues in European Framework Programme grants. This approach could be adopted by the ARC were the Act revised appropriately.

In summary, I hope that revisions to the ARC Act will permit the funding of research in Australia that forms part of larger, international collaborative activity that is often peer reviewed by panels outside Australia. This would have a significant positive impact on the quality and scale of Australian research. Should you require further input I would be happy to provide a briefing.

Yours Sincerely,

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