

25 February 2022

The Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee

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Australian Research Council Amendment (Ensuring Research Independence) Bill 2018

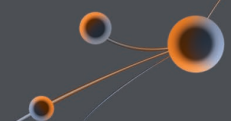
Submission to the Committee's Inquiry

Introduction

Research Australia is pleased to have the opportunity to make this submission in response to the invitation received on 14 February.

Research Australia is the national alliance representing the entire health and medical research (HMR) pipeline, from the laboratory to the patient and the marketplace. Research Australia works to position Australian HMR as a significant driver of a healthy population and a healthy economy.

Research funding from the Australian Research Council (ARC) is relevant to Research Australia's membership because, while the ARC does not fund 'medical research', the ARC funds much of the basic research that underpins health and medical research, as well as supporting the broader research ecosystem.



Research Independence

Research Australia is concerned by the decision on 24 December 2021 by the Acting Minister for Education the Hon. Stuart Robert to decline to fund six ARC Discovery Projects, and the three previous occasions when the Minister has exercised this veto.

Research Australia accepts the right of the Government to set the criteria for research funding programs, including the eligible applicants and research areas, and the amounts of funding available.

Research Australia does not believe the Minister should have the power to refuse to fund individual research proposals that are recommended by the CEO of the ARC under an approved funding program.

The assessment of individual funding proposals is best undertaken by individuals with expertise in the subject matter area, and this is the case with the assessment process employed by the ARC. While recognising that it has a long history of more than a century and has been subject to change, Research Australia supports the Haldane Principle as stated in the UK's Higher Education and Research Act 'that decisions on individual research proposals are best taken following an evaluation of the quality and likely impact of the proposals (such as a peer-review process).'

[Higher Education and Research Act UK 2017, section 103]

Research Australia supports amending the ARC Act to remove the Minister's responsibility under section 53(4) of the Act for deciding which individual research proposals should be approved for funding.

Yours sincerely



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