



27 January 2022

The Honourable Stuart Robert, MP
Acting Minister for Education and Youth
stuart.robert.mp@aph.gov.au

CC: Professor Sue Thomas
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Research Council
ceo@arc.gov.au

Re: Ministerial interference in 2021 Australian Research Council Discovery Grants

Dear Minister Robert,

As Presidents of a number of learned societies we write to express our concerns about the continued use of the National Interest Test to veto the funding of Australian Research Council Discovery Grants recommended for funding by the Australian Research Council (ARC) College of Experts. While national interest should be a factor in the allocation of research funding, our strongly-held view is that this should be (and already is) achieved through the assessment process carried out by the ARC. An ex post facto ministerial intervention in the form of a veto cannot possibly be in Australia's national interest. Such a veto severely erodes the trust the scientific community has in the process of research funding allocation. It also damages our international reputation as a country with a healthy and thriving ecosystem for conducting scientific research, and will ultimately diminish our scientific competitiveness as a nation. Already this process of veto has reduced our international colleagues' willingness to contribute their expertise to the ARC process.

We can think of very few examples of selection processes for government funding in Australia that are as selective and rigorous as that carried out by the ARC. We strongly endorse the recent call by the members of the Australian Research Council College of Experts to legislate amendments to the Australian Research Council Act 2001 to ensure the independence of the

ARC and to maintain the rigour and integrity of the ARC's grant assessment process by ending the Minister's use of the National Interest Test.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Steven Bottle, President, Royal Australian Chemical Institute (RACI)
Associate Professor Jessica Kasza, President, Statistical Society of Australia (SSA)
Professor John Lattanzio, President, Astronomical Society of Australia (ASA)
Professor Sven Rogge, President, Australian Institute of Physics (AIP)
Professor Ole Warnaar, President, Australian Mathematical Society (AustMS)