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To whom it may concern,

I write to you about my concerns regarding the ministerial veto powers over research grants that are recommended by the Australian Research Council (ARC) and their recent application which amounts to political interference. I am especially concerned as I am currently a researcher working outside of Australia and would dearly love to return to Australia and contribute to Australian research. The ministers veto powers and the way they have been applied in recent years create an obstacle for my return to Australia to continue my research career as it creates significant uncertainty as to whether such a career would be viable.

I am an Australian citizen, and I completed a PhD in the Chemical Sciences in 2019. After unsuccessfully searching for a job in this field within Australia for several months I broadened my search to include the UK. There is much more opportunity for people in my field in the UK which is highlighted by the fact that I was offered a position for the first place I applied at the University of Leeds. I have been working in the UK since then and would dearly love to return to Australia. One means by which this may be viable is by applying for a Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) which is administered by the ARC. However, I am reconsidering this application due to the minister's veto power over ARC grants and the way this power has been used in recent years.

An application for the DECRA scheme requires a document of approximately 50 pages. It is a highly competitive scheme so the entire document must be of the highest quality which will require several rounds of editing. This will require a significant allocation of my time as well as the time of other academics who will assist with my application. Given the highly competitive nature of the scheme only ~20% of applications are recommended for funding by the CEO of the ARC so there is a good chance my application will not be successful. I can accept this as I know that the peer-review selection process is rigorous and is conducted by experts in the relevant fields. What I cannot accept is that a non-expert such as the minister can veto these grants for political reasons after they have been through such a rigorous review and selection process. It is clear to me that the ministers who have used this veto power in recent years had little knowledge of the grant proposals beyond their titles. Their assertions that the vetoed grants are not in the national interest or do not present value for money are at odds with the reviewers of these grants. The expert reviewers are required to assess such things and the ministers cannot accurately assess these factors given their limited knowledge of the contents of the grant proposals.

The ministerial veto power should be removed so that Australian researchers have clarity and certainty about which research proposals are eligible for funding. This should not be subject to the political whims of the government of the day. This certainty is essential for researchers in similar positions as myself who want to return to Australia and contribute to Australian research without veto powers creating obstacles.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Thomas Nicholls