

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2015 - 16, 21 October 2015

Ref No: SQ15-000810

OUTCOME: 1 - Population Health

Topic: Reducing the Number of Reviewers

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Xenophon, Nick

Question:

The article states that the NHMRC has argued that a simplified process risks compromising the integrity of the system. “Reducing the number of reviewers or the information required in the proposal would likely compromise NHMRC’s ability to select the best proposals from a field of so many excellent ideas” however on the contrary a study published in the British Medical Journal found a process involving just two reviewers who independently reviewed just the proposals, not track record, as agreeing 74% of the time in comparison to a panel of seven reviewers who met face-to face to review proposals and track record as agreeing only 72% of the time, further from the 75% target. What evidence does the NHMRC have that reducing the number of reviewers would compromise the process?

Answer:

International best-practice, including a recent study published by Snell RR in PLOS ONE, indicates that peer review that includes more than two assessors increases reliability and decision consistency. The National Health and Medical Research Council is exploring simplified peer review models and “will continue to introduce evidence-based improvements into its processes to achieve the highest quality decision-making through peer review”¹.

¹ NHMRC’s Principles of Peer Review (<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/grants-funding/peer-review/nhmrc-principles-peer-review>)