What do we know about funding peer review?

Adrian Barnett, Danielle Herbert, Nick Graves, Philip Clarke

Where did all the science go?
Evidence of effectiveness?

• 2005: “There is little empirical evidence on the effects of grant giving peer review. No studies assessing the impact of peer review on the quality of funded research are presently available.” DOI: 10.1002/14651858.MR000003

• 2018: “There is a need for open, transparent experimentation and evaluation of different ways to fund research.” DOI: 10.12688/f1000research.11917.2

• 2014: “Peer preview” Donald Braben
Many have foregone vacations, sacrificed 1 to 3 months of productive research.

In most cases peer reviewers are in fact deciding that one shade of blue is competitively superior to another shade of blue.

Could survival be more closely related to slick grantsmanship than to scientific creativity?

It's not clear that the presumed gain in quality is worth so much money.

Relationships [...] are colored by the knowledge that everyone is a potential reviewer.

It has become almost universal practice for researchers to "propose" what they have already done.

Grant winners rotate in a financial game of musical chairs based more on chance than sense.
“My family hates my profession”
“I have sacrificed personal time, holidays, many social and work commitments, sleep, exercise and much more to devote months to writing grants”
Sneaky behaviour #1

• “I actively avoid some collaborations with my peers so I have an appropriate expert to review my application” 21% agree

• “I actively solicit some collaborations with my peers in order to create conflicts of interest and rule them out as expert reviewers for my application” 16% agree
Sneaky behaviour #2

• “I have already done more than 25% of the work proposed in my submitted research plan” 47% agree
• “If my proposal is funded, I will use some of the funding for other projects” 49% agree
Confessions of a panel member

I queried the NHMRC on one of the applications I had trouble verifying. I told them I was using Google looking for evidence of the impact but had encountered a difficulty [...] the NHMRC official said that I should not have looked for evidence of the impacts online [...] I asked “If I claim to have won a Nobel Prize how would you know it was true or not”? The official went to consult with their supervisor, who confirmed that we are not supposed to check outside of the application

Alternatives
How much would each researcher receive if competitive government research funding were distributed equally among researchers?

Krist Vaesen, Joel Katzav

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## Voting

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“It’s that time of year when guys randomly explode.”