

# Open Access Australasia Response to Chief Scientist's Proposal for Open Access in Australia.

14 March 2024.

Written in response to the article [Australia's Chief Scientist takes on the journal publishers gatekeeping knowledge](#) published by The Guardian March 10, 2024.

Open Access Australasia supports the Chief Scientist, Dr Cathy Foley, in making open access a priority issue and we welcome her engagement in this issue. We would urge an open public consultation on the proposal now. In the meantime, we offer the following high-level observations:

It is very important that any national approach in Australia supports both a diversity of approaches to open access in scholarly communication and ensures equity for both readers to access and authors to publish open access.

## Diversity of pathways to open access

Open Access Australasia supports a diversity of approaches to making research open.

- Thanks to the efforts of researchers, libraries, funders and institutions some 60% of research produced by Australian institutions is now openly accessible to the public. The challenges now are what are the most effective ways to sustainably make research open to all those who need to access it and what infrastructure is needed to deliver it - including and beyond costly commercial publishers.
- The plan currently being put forth by the Chief Scientist proposes open access via a national agreement with a selection of commercial publishers. The proposed business model is not detailed in the article, but the plan does not appear to recognise that there are diverse pathways to open access currently being practised, which are essential to ensure that diverse communities of publishing can thrive, including academic led approaches and those that serve underrepresented communities such as Indigenous research.
- Agreements with commercial publishers, through deals that bundle together the cost of subscriptions and publishing (otherwise levied as Article Processing Charges), have been pursued in the last few years (via CAUL) and have increased the rate of open publications. This is just one approach. Additional approaches are needed, such as more innovative ways of making research available, including investment in national repository infrastructure, local journals, and in Australia's knowledge capacity. Such moves would be a positive investment for the Australian taxpayer and the research community.

## Equity for authors and readers

Open Access Australasia supports equity in scholarly communications, to both access and publish research.

- It is unclear how the current plan proposed by the Chief Scientist will allow for equity of access for the reader, limiting it to Australians registered with the government MyGov application. It is also unclear how equity for authors will be supported.
- In recent years many international initiatives have explored endemic inequities in the present scholarly publishing system, which manifests geographical and linguistic biases including marginalising Indigenous knowledges. In considering a national approach to open access, Australia has a unique opportunity to address these considerations and initiate reform.

## Diversity of scholarly research outputs

Australia's libraries currently provide access to and preserve the entire breadth of research produced in Australia via repositories and subscriptions, including journal articles, books, theses, data, software, and creative media.

The current plan proposed by the Chief Scientist only appears to include peer reviewed journal articles. In a world where there are over 2000 academic publishers it is unclear how the model would scale, or whether it will focus on a small subset of large, highly profitable multinationals at the expense of more diverse and specialised knowledge producers.

Open Access Australasia welcomes debate about open access to Australian research and developing an affordable, diverse and equitable publishing ecosystem - and has championed such approaches. Our vision includes:

- Investment in Australia's capabilities and open infrastructure, including repositories, to provide access to Australian research at potentially lower cost than commercial models.
- Support for and investment in existing local journal publishing infrastructure, providing quality, robust outlets for Australian disciplines and expertise.
- Exploring a cross-sector, joined up approach to enabling copyright in research to be retained by researchers and their institutions, either through coordinated policy or copyright reform, so that it can be shared more easily.

We urge the release of the Chief Scientist's proposal for public consultation so that these and other approaches can be discussed.

*Open Access Australasia is a membership organisation of 24 Australian university libraries, 8 Aotearoa New Zealand university libraries through the Council of New Zealand University Librarians, Creative Commons Australia, Tohatoha Aotearoa Commons, Australian Library and Information Association, Australian Digital Alliance, Wikimedia Australia, the Australian Citizen Science Association and National and State Libraries Australasia. Its mission is to attain open access to research in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand through advocacy, collaboration, awareness, and capacity building across the Australian and New Zealand research sectors.*

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