

to change poor policies with respect to science, education and biological conservation. Help agencies write better policies and to develop management protocols based on the best available science. We should determine the direction of scientific endeavour and discourse in our communities, not politicians and bureaucrats whose environmental, social and economic policies provide convincing evidence that they have no real understanding of ecological processes or of the dependence of humanity on the services provided by healthy, functional ecosystems. If governments and

managerialism are allowed to continue to marginalize science and to prevent scientists from communicating with the general public, not only will we lose our rights to conduct research, but we will have failed to meet our responsibilities to communities within which we live. Our failure will mean that future generations will inherit an environmentally challenged and depauperate planet, a planet devoid of the life and opportunities we have been privileged to enjoy.

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Editorial Policy on Referees

THERE is more to being a scientist than completing a research project and communicating the results to one's peers and the general public. Scientists have a wide range of responsibilities both within the scientific community and within society as a whole. I have frequently urged my colleagues to participate in the political processes of environmental management and conservation. It is equally necessary for scientists to contribute to the mechanics of keeping the scientific community functional. Individuals need to take responsibility for organizing scientific meetings, administering scientific societies, reviewing grant applications, and publishing professional journals. Peer review of the work and research proposals of colleagues is a necessary contribution of time if the machinery of science is to function smoothly. As editor of this journal, I can assure you that not all scientists accept these responsibilities.

The greatest challenge in being the editor of a scientific journal is not in finding good papers to publish. Rather, it is in finding individuals willing and able to critically and constructively review papers submitted for publication. As we all know, constructive refereeing is necessary to ensure quality publication. Despite this, more than a third of reviews sought by this journal are either inadequate or are never received: hence, the need to send all papers to three referees. Poor and tardy refereeing accounts for the largest part of the delay from when a paper is received to when it is finally published (or rejected). So serious is this problem, that I now refuse to accept

papers from individuals who have consistently failed to participate in the process of peer review. In addition, when I am asked to referee a paper by another journal or to review a grant application by a granting agency and the author or applicant is a person who I know refuses to participate in reviewing the work of others, I refuse to referee their work. In doing so, I am careful to explain the reason to those who have made the request.

Can I ask that if you receive a paper to review and are unable or unwilling to do so that you at least advise the editor. Often we simply cannot find out if the paper was even received despite repeated requests for an answer. If you cannot referee a paper, it would be helpful if you could suggest an alternative referee. If you want to referee the paper, but it will take longer than requested (usually three weeks), please advise us and more time will be granted. Passing on a paper for review to a colleague, even a postgraduate student, is entirely appropriate so long as the person asked to fill in has the necessary knowledge. I do use postgraduate students as referees from time to time and am considering using postgraduates as the third referee on a regular basis. Advice from readers and contributors to the journal on this particular point, as well as names, contact details and area of expertise of suitably qualified and willing students, would be welcome. I believe it would be good experience for students and it would take some of the burden from more senior individuals, most of whom I will concede are already very busy.

HARRY F. RECHER