
Letter to the Editor

Re: Publish or Perish: A new look at bibliometric statistics in the PBRF age

I read with interest, but little enthusiasm, the above article in *NZ Science Review* (Vol 67 (4) 2010). About the only comment that struck a chord was a final caveat: 'For instance, in the field of molecular biology Lawrence (2007) has shown how poorly Watson and Crick's work on DNA would have fared under such a regime'. Here is an even pithier comment in the same vein by an eminent Nobel Laureate in an article that I refer to further below: 'Fortunately, very fortunately, most of the great human minds of the past had not yet to worry about the mediocrity of rating agencies. Otherwise, human history would have taken a very different course, and many of the greatest human achievements would never have been made.'

At about the same time that the Publish or Perish article appeared, I received coincidentally my Vol. 20(1) copy of the *epr newsletter* (*The publication of the International EPR (ESR) Society*). The article referred to above was by Richard R Ernst, ETH Zürich: The Follies of Citation Indices and Academic Ranking Lists. (Reprinted with permission from: R. R. Ernst, *Chimia*, **2010**, 64, 90. Copyright (2010), the Swiss Chemical

Society). In the article Ernst proposes a number of remedies 'to save the dignity and creativity of scientists and researchers'. I should like to commend the article to readers and conclude this letter with a, verbatim, quotation of the final paragraph of the Ernst paper:

And as an ultimate plea, the personal wish of the author remains to send all bibliometrics and its diligent servants to the darkest (omnivorous) black hole in the entire universe, in order to liberate academia forever from this pestilence. – And there is indeed an alternative: very simply, start reading papers instead of merely rating them by counting citations.

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