



and, unless corrected, will inevitably decouple NSERC from the needs and priorities of the Canadian Astronomical community.

Foreign astronomers provide a useful perspective, but have little appreciation for the strategic direction of the Canadian community. Their research priorities will in general be different from ours, and align with their own National plans. The US Decadal Plan and the Long Range Plan for Canadian Astronomy differ in many significant aspects; the all too real danger is that the predominance of US reviewers in the 1505 conference will lead to US priorities being enforced on Canadian astronomers.

Furthermore, a pre-requisite for a fair peer-review process is that the reviewers must be familiar with the Canadian university system and the Canadian standards for research productivity, teaching loads, and HQP training. The US system is significantly different from ours: funding opportunities are more numerous and come from a variety of sources. Teaching loads are different. Generally speaking, it is easier to support students and postdoctoral fellows within the US system, and many US universities can rely on a steady number of independently funded postdoctoral fellows which is far higher than available in Canada. As a consequence, an excellent HQP training record for a researcher in a Canadian university might not appear overly impressive to our US colleagues. This could easily translate in a downgrade unless the reviewers are familiar with Canadian standards.

Finally, but equally important, within the current review system Canadian proposal intellectual property is effectively being handed out primarily to foreign countries. This is widely recognized as undesirable: for instance, Canadian telescope proposals are preferentially reviewed by Canadian astronomers precisely to avoid leakage of concepts and ideas.

CASCA fully realizes that the relatively small size of the Canadian astronomical community, combined with the need to avoid conflict of interests, presents challenges to the selection of panel members. However, these challenges can and must be overcome. Identifying high calibre Canadian representation has always been possible for all other Canadian astronomical committees, including CASCA's committees, Canadian Time Allocation Committees, Science Advisory Committees and Board of Directors of astronomical facilities with Canadian interest. We see no reason why NSERC should be an exception.

CASCA would appreciate a response from NSERC detailing the reasons that allowed this situation to arise, and a reassurance that it will be corrected in future competitions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Laura Ferrarese", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Laura Ferrarese

CASCA President