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National Science and Technology Council
Task Force on Public Access to Scholarly Publications

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Dear Colleagues,

I am writing in response to the RFI on Public Access to Peer-Reviewed Scholarly Publications Resulting From Federally Funded Research, published in the Federal Register Volume 76, Number 214, on Friday, November 4, 2011. I am currently based at the Max Planck Institute in Germany, and am writing as a US citizen whose previous research in the US was supported by various Federal agencies, including the NIH, NSH, USDA and DOE. I am an elected member of the US and German national academies and a Foreign Member of the Royal Society of London. I have served on the Editorial Boards of several scientific journals, both ones published by for-profit entities such as Elsevier Inc. and ones published by not-for-profit scientific organizations such as the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Since September of this year, I am Deputy-Editor-in-Chief of a new open access journal, eLife, jointly sponsored by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (US), Wellcome Trust (UK) and Max Planck Society (Germany).

The pace of science has greatly accelerated in the 25+ years that I have personally witnessed. Ironically, although electronic dissemination on the Internet should enable the entire scientific community to rapidly access the latest results, only elite institutions with deep pockets can afford to pay the often very steep subscription charges that apply to the majority of scientific publications. Rapid access, in turn, is not only absolutely essential for all of us to stay competitive, but it is also important to avoid duplication of research efforts and ensure that Federal grant monies are used as efficiently as possible.

As other areas, large parts of science are currently transformed by "Big Data", where those who produce such data often analyze only a small fraction of these data. This creates tremendous opportunities for anyone with access to the Internet and clever ideas for data analysis, thus greatly leveraging the initial investment, which often was in the form of Federal grants. Again, not being able to access primary publications in a timely manner impedes the efficient use of such data.

For these reasons, I wish to express my strongest support for an official Federal policy in support of open access to the scientific literature.

Yours truly,

Detlef Weigel
Director, Max Planck Institute