

What are we thinking?

The success of *Nature Climate Change* in attracting an increasing number of high-quality submissions necessarily means that editorial criteria for publication are becoming steadily more demanding.

As we approach our second birthday it seems timely to relay to our growing population of authors and readers just what goes on between our editorial ears as we consider the torrent of newly generated knowledge and ideas that flow through our office. *Nature Climate Change*'s editorial processes and policies are directly inherited from *Nature*, so they will be familiar to many. Nevertheless, an explicit part of our remit is to traverse traditional academic boundaries, requiring us to reach beyond the existing pool of 'Nature family' authors and readers — although not to their exclusion. Most notably, our intention is to draw social sciences scholars into our embrace, along with policymakers, technologists, educators and all others concerned with understanding and responding to the challenges of climate change.

We would like to take this opportunity to elaborate on our editorial approach and thinking as it relates to primary research and review material for the benefit of new authors and readers, and to reacquaint ourselves with the old hands.

It is a privilege to be at the nexus of so much new and exciting research. We currently receive in the region of 80 to 100 manuscripts per month, but less than 10% can be published. The overwhelming majority of submissions — around 80% are declined without external review. Statistically speaking, a prospective author's most probable form of contact with an editor on our team is a letter declining to publish their research on editorial grounds. Such decisions are rarely easy, and are never taken lightly. Only once we are confident that we have understood a new finding — and how it relates to the existing literature — are we comfortable rejecting a manuscript editorially. These judgments are based primarily on an assessment of the degree of conceptual advance presented in a paper, and its potential interest and importance, not only to others in the same or related fields, but also to the broader climate change community. Such decisions rarely reflect any doubts about the quality of the work reported, or its value in a particular field.

For those papers that are sent out to review, we do not ask referees to comment

on the suitability of a paper for *Nature Climate Change*, or base our decisions on a simple show of hands. Instead, we ask referees to specify what they think the paper's contribution and significance to be, along with their assessment of the technical quality of the work. Based on these comments and our own editorial criteria — which take into account the competition for space and the need to balance material across the broad spectrum of research relevant to climate change — we then decide whether publication in *Nature Climate Change* is justified. As a rule, a paper should, at a minimum, excite the interest of experts in the field — if it does not, we are likely to take the view that it would be better placed in another journal, even if comments were otherwise reasonably positive.

In trying to understand editorial decisions, comparisons to previous papers that have appeared in the journal are rarely helpful; although we strive for editorial consistency, different studies inevitably have different strengths and weaknesses, and each submission is assessed on its own merits. Moreover, the editorial criteria we apply in any given field evolve as the field develops. We must also find the right balance between 'hot topic' papers and those from the many other areas within the journal's broad remit. The need to balance topic coverage is particularly influential in editorial decisions for Review Articles and Perspectives. Similarly the likelihood that a submission will be highly cited is not a sufficient reason for it to be published in the journal. Of course we are pleased to see *Nature Climate Change* papers receiving a high number of rapid citations, but are also well aware that this is no guarantee of a paper's long-term impact or importance.

Our Review Articles are designed to provide a forum for authoritative, balanced synthesis of recent developments in a research field. Perspectives are similar, but can be narrower in focus and have the licence to be more opinionated, with a view to stimulating discussion or setting an agenda for future work. For both formats brevity and accessibility are more important than encyclopaedic coverage, and authors should aim to add value by

synthesizing a new hypothesis or view that the community will find useful.

Space for Review Articles and Perspectives is very limited, so it is particularly important for the editors to manage this section to represent the many facets of climate change research. As a result, we aim to invite the majority of these papers, so although unsolicited submissions are welcomed we must decline the majority. When Review Articles and Perspectives are sent out to review we ask referees to comment on the level of interest to people within the particular field and the clarity of message, as well as whether there is adequate and appropriate reference to the literature and coverage of important topics. Authors of invited Review Articles and Perspectives are usually given the opportunity to revise their manuscript in response to the referees' comments, unless they clearly undermine the general case for publication. Unsolicited submissions have a much greater chance of being rejected after review.

It is no coincidence that this editorial, which highlights our increasing submissions, appears in the first of two bumper issues of *Nature Climate Change*. These are timed to coincide with our two year anniversary, and will feature 20 research papers each — roughly double the normal output. The number of accepted manuscripts which has facilitated these extra-large issues is a testament to both the quantity and quality of manuscripts we have received in recent months. However, bumper issues must be considered exceptional, rather than a regular occurrence: with no extra space on offer and steadily more high-quality research vying for pages, the editorial threshold has only one way to go — a trend that we believe is ultimately to the benefit of our readers, as well as to the journal itself. Although this inevitably means that more manuscripts are rejected without review, we endeavor to make this process as rapid and efficient as possible. We believe that the benefits of this 'Nature' way of doing things compensate for the high chance of rejection. As an editorial team we look forward to reading and digesting all of the papers submitted — if the past is any indicator of the future, it will be a fascinating task. □