

## Let peer review be transparent

For all peer reviewed articles submitted from 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023, we will publish the editor decision letters, reviewer reports and author responses, together with the published paper. Reviewers can choose to remain anonymous or reveal their identity.

Transparency is important to us. From launch, we have recognized the editors who have handled a published article in the “Peer review information” section at the end of each paper. We have later added reviewer recognition, where we publish the names of those reviewers who wish to be acknowledged. In addition, we already publish a peer review file—comprised of our decision letters, the reviewers’ comments to the authors and the authors’ responses to these comments—for peer reviewed articles whose authors have explicitly asked us to do so. We are now extending publication of this accompanying peer review file to all articles that are submitted from 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023 onwards and reviewed externally, that is, all primary research and overview articles (Reviews and Perspectives), and some of our Opinion pieces.

At *Communications Earth & Environment*, we are convinced that opening up the scholarly discussions that precede publication of our articles will deepen understanding of the scientific process and help spark trust in science. We are enormously grateful for the time and effort our reviewers put into elaborating on the merits and shortcomings of papers with the aim to improve them. We are impressed by the detailed and positive letters our authors send back along with their revisions in response to the points raised by the reviewers. And we are proud to put care and thought into our editorial decisions and give constructive guidance to our authors by explaining our take on the reviewer comments.

For example, for an [article](#) on the contribution of small icebergs to the freshwater budget in a Greenland fjord, we specified in our first [decision letter](#) two minimum editorial requirements that we felt had to be met in order for us to consider publication in *Communications Earth & Environment*: we asked the authors to present robust evidence that

small icebergs contribute substantially more freshwater to the two Greenland’s fjords under investigation than previously thought, and that the method be described at a level of detail that ensures reproducibility. We also noted where changes in response to reviewer requests were not essential for publication from our point of view: we encouraged the authors to investigate whether higher resolution or their machine-learning-based method led to the reported improvements, but made it clear that this is not a condition of publication. By providing this sort of editorial guidance on many of our revise decisions—those that are not completely straightforward—we hope to give authors clarity on our expectations, and help them decide on the best way forward for their paper.

We feel that these discussions between reviewers, editors and authors provide rich context for each published paper. Making the material available has the potential to deepen readers’ appreciation of the results. Reviewers often compare the manuscript under review to earlier publications on related topics, and comment how it fits into the more general progress in the field, and the authors often respond with interesting elaborations of their rationale.

Opening the peer review files also showcases the level of thought and consideration that goes into the publication process. Simply the fact that the material is freely available and open, rather than hidden behind closed doors, has the potential to generate trust. Taking the peer review information files across many papers gives insight into the process of peer review with its strengths as well as its limitations: readers get a sense which kinds of issues peer review can—and cannot—be expected to reveal.

In addition, the information can, for example, be used by early career researchers as a resource for understanding how to put together a critical yet constructive

peer review report, or how to respond effectively to comments received on their own papers.

We leave it to our reviewers whether they would like to be known to the authors and whether they would like to be publicly acknowledged for their contribution to peer review. Only if they choose to be named will we reveal their identity.

Although we very much favour transparency, we allow some redactions and confidential comments to the editors by either authors or reviewers, for example, for reasons of copyright or permissions to publish material or where unpublished data or other confidential information are brought up. Email conversations between

authors and editors are also not part of the formal peer review process, and hence not made available.

Our extension of transparent peer review to all peer reviewed articles at *Communications Earth & Environment* corresponds to [the move at Nature Communications](#).

We hope that our authors, reviewers and readers will share our enthusiasm for shedding light on the pre-publication process at *Communications Earth & Environment*.

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