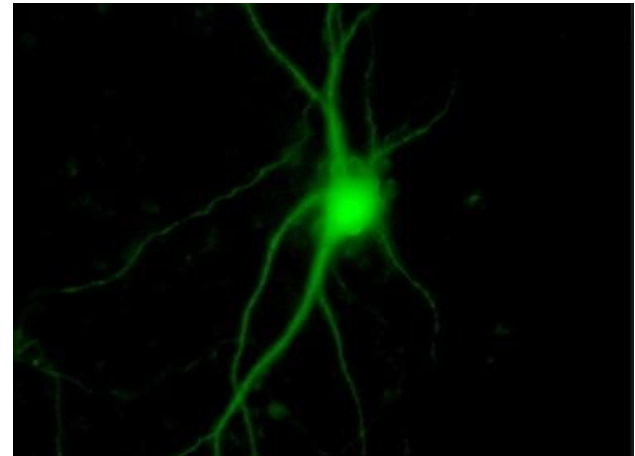
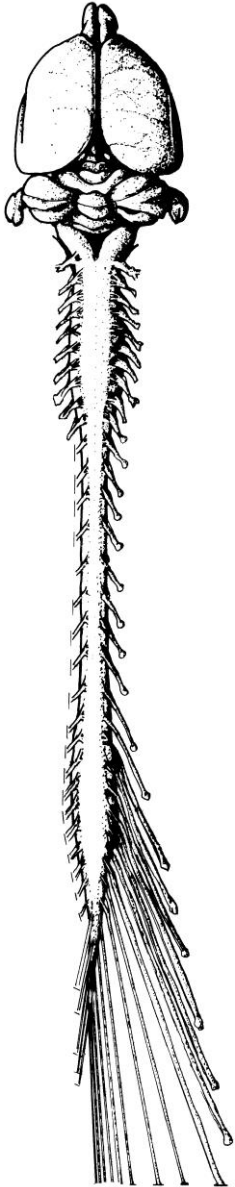


# TIPS FOR WRITING AN EXEMPLARY NHMRC APPLICATION

Bob Callister – *basic scientist FH&M*

- views based on *my* GRP experiences
- my field is sensory physiology – *specifically* pain and balance (game is field specific, but..)
- ***approach*** –first page/five things & sections



# ***YOUR GRANT: IS IT SIMPLE, CLEAR, NOVEL & RELEVANT?***

- a grant is a political document & packaging is everything!
- KISS principle - take pity on assessors and GRP members
- ***FIVE*** things must come across clearly to ***any*** reader ***very early*** in your application (preferably on first page)
- These ***FIVE*** things should appear on first page
  1. pose problem
    - clinically relevant - clinicians on panels
    - good science wins every time - translational angle?
  2. what's the pressing issue associated with your problem
  3. why have previous approaches failed - spell it out
  4. but there is hope - ***what is your "pitch"?*** - what is your new approach/technique
  5. overall H<sub>0</sub> - then no more than three Aims/H<sub>0</sub>s

# AIMS

*Put serious effort into developing Aims section (first page)*

- I believe this is most important for subsequent “construction” of your proposal: and its easy “digestion”
- I like an overall question and then three questions/aims/hypotheses that address your big question
- continually look back at your Aims section as you write your grant - **no surprises** or new ideas/concepts **after** the Aims section

*In summary, we have a very limited understanding of the mechanisms by which signals from the gut are processed in the spinal cord under either normal or pathological conditions. We **combine** a well-established model of IBD with in vivo patch clamp electrophysiology and anatomical analysis to study plasticity in the spinal cords of adult mice. Such high-resolution data of events that occur at the first central processing node for signals arising from the gut is essential if we are to understand the changes induced by debilitating inflammatory bowel disorders. This study will provide an essential foundation for future experiments aimed at discovering and testing therapeutic agents to treat the pain that accompanies IBD. ¶*

# **BACKGROUND**

*I believe people put far too much time into this part of their application*

- people often write the Background first – write it last!
- Background should virtually write itself after Aims and Research plan
- I love pictures – they save space and people who read your grant are busy and generally NOT experts
  - make purpose-built figures – only relevant information, not crappy/fuzzy scans from one of your papers
  - even if your type of work doesn't lend itself to figures flow diagrams etc. help
- stick your preliminary data in here to show how YOU are advancing the field and that your experiments are feasible

# **RESEARCH PLAN**

*This can sink you after assessors have waded through your background*

- brief outline first, then experimental details (“skimable”)
- stick exactly to the **same** Aim headings as on first page
- make sure your experiments answer the questions posed in your aims
- include plenty of detail re design, animal/subject numbers and statistical analysis. Stats and complicated designs not my area, but I have seen grants sink on bad design
- precious experiments!!! your grant is a political document – watch the “tacked on” experiment
- dependent Aims – always a red flag

# ***SIGNIFICANCE***

- many people don't actually write anything re their grant's significance?
- spend some time on this and don't hurry it - last thing assessors read!
- measured claims - don't make really “big calls” and say if I find this then we can now go on and do this if it's BS

## ***TONE/ATTITUDE AND OTHER FACTORS***

- “arrogance” - our group is the best in the world (GRP folks joke: “I never knew there we so many world experts in Australia?”)
- Write your grant so it’s bleatingly obvious that you are good and a serious player in your field
- Team: only people who have clear role in project and lift the grant. Avoid the high-flyer with awesome CV who’s role is unclear and time commitment low (5%).
- View your “assembled grant” before it goes off
  - “Assessor Snapshot Report” is what GRP members get- plus 9 pages and Summary document

# ***BUDGET***

- Standard budget = 1 & 1/2 FT wages and \$50K p.a. DRCs. This = \$500 - 600K. If going for more, really need to justify it. I believe budget can create a “smell”
- PSP level needs to be justified by work required, ***not*** by the *PSP* skills (>10yr post doc and CIA are exceptions - their wage usually funded at appropriate level)
- A 'tight' budget provides a general “feel good factor”, and may be rewarded with no changes. Once committee pulls out scalpel things can go badly
- Convince GRP you're already running on the smell of an oily rag! A GRP member who says: “these folks are good value” can influence budget decisions