



May 9, 2018

Dear Professor Blaikie,

I am writing to provide an update on my investigation into the complaint received from Dr Pole regarding the research publications of Dr Tammo Reichgelt, coauthored and supervised by Professor Daphne Lee (Geology).

Professor Lee has now provided a detailed, point-by-point response to the primary issues raised in the complaint of Dr Pole. Professor Lee's letter is attached here for your information.

I have also discussed the various issues raised in the complaint with a geological colleague (Professor Dave Craw), who I trust to be a relatively 'neutral' observer in this case. Professor Craw is familiar with the history of the discipline, and also with the geological strata at the heart of the complaint. As such, he is in a good position to advise me on both the scientific and academic issues raised.

There are several different strands to Dr Pole's complaint, some centred around alleged plagiarism – specifically, the failure to appropriately and accurately acknowledge sources and intellectual property; and others centred around an alleged lack of scientific credibility (e.g. study design; data interpretation; correlations among geological strata; the reconstruction and dating of Miocene ecosystems; the role of fire, etc.).

My overall view is that there are indeed some shortcomings in the work of Reichgelt et al. – in terms of both its scientific accuracy, and in its failure to accurately acknowledge all sources of intellectual property.

In my view, Dr Pole has some basis for feeling aggrieved – in that previous work done by him and/or colleagues has at times been referenced inaccurately and/or in a fairly cursory fashion. In particular, someone reading the caption to Figure 2 of Reichgelt et al. could easily obtain the false impression that the correlations/sections themselves are the work of Reichgelt et al., rather than being reliant on previous studies by Douglas (1986) and others.



Dr Pole is also aggrieved that previous scientific work and hypotheses based on the same study system have, in his view, been ignored and/or dismissed in a fairly cursory manner by Reichgelt et al. I feel this part of Dr Pole's complaint represents a secondary issue that would be better resolved through the scientific literature (e.g. by publishing a review or critique).

In her letter, I am satisfied that Professor Lee has provided considered and reflective responses to many of the issues raised by Dr Pole - where she does acknowledge limitations and shortcomings in the work of Reichgelt and coauthors:

***"In hindsight, it would have been better to use the Douglas (1986) reference and to make it clear which two of the four columns (Kawarau River section and Vinegar Hill section) were redrawn from Douglas (1986)."***

***"We accept that material from this locality may have been previously collected by Dr Pole."***

***"In hindsight, the limitations of the age estimates for these strata and localities could have been more clearly spelled out."***

***"While we acknowledge that several authors have discussed the possibly significant role of fire in Otago's Miocene, unfortunately there was insufficient space/scope to explore this in detail in this article."***

After reflecting on the complaint and response letters, and in discussion with Professor Craw, I have reached the following conclusions:

(1) the paper by Reichgelt et al. does contain some cases of inaccurate referencing (as admitted by Professor Lee in her response, e.g. regarding insufficient referencing of Douglas (1986)). As Professor Lee admits, most of the appropriate references were included in Reichgelt et al., but attribution of sources was not always accurate or clear. In my view, such failings are highly regrettable, but on balance fall short of deliberate and serious misconduct.

(2) the study of Reichgelt and coauthors contains some inaccurate and/or questionable scientific interpretations (as admitted by Prof Lee in her response, e.g. regarding precise ages for Miocene strata). These are issues of scientific rigour/accuracy that should, in my view, be corrected or clarified in the literature, but do not amount to cases of serious and deliberate scientific misconduct.



I understand that Dr Pole might not feel completely satisfied by the outcome of this preliminary investigation. I personally hold the scientific work of Dr Pole in extremely high regard, and understand that he feels aggrieved by postgraduate work that in this case has failed to completely live up to the high standards that he (and we) should expect. Overall, however, I do not see a strong case for launching a more formal investigation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Waters".

Professor Jonathan Waters  
Associate Dean Research  
Division of Sciences  
University of Otago  
New Zealand

[jon.waters@otago.ac.nz](mailto:jon.waters@otago.ac.nz)