

Dear AGU's Publications Committee and Editors

As corresponding author of a manuscript recently submitted to Geophysical Research Letters, I was asked to complete the questionnaire below to evaluate the review process of the Journal. I am doing so in the attachment to this letter below. In this letter I would like to explain our concerns in a more detailed way as a response to question 6 of the questionnaire "Considering the entire review process, what do you think is the most important improvement that AGU could make for this journal?"

I would like that my comments be attributed to me; I am also copying this message to the handling Editor and to all my co-authors who shared this experience with me.

In our paper submitted to GRL we derived horizontal pressure gradients associated with condensation of atmospheric water vapor. We showed that this previously unstudied mechanism has far-reaching implications for understanding atmospheric circulation.

Referee 1 was very positive and recommended publication as is. Referee 2 characterized the paper as interesting but confusing. Based on these reports, the Editor informed us that the paper could be publishable provided we responded to the comments of Referee 2. The Editor wrote to us that he was planning to show our revised manuscript to Referee 2 and perhaps to one more referee.

We submitted our revised manuscript with a detailed response to the very brief comments made by Referee 2. We then received a decision letter from the Editor accompanied by comments of Referee 1 and Referee 3 (but not Referee 2). The Editor wrote that he was declining our paper based on his own perusal of the paper and the referees' comments. Referee 1 remained very positive; Referee 3 was very negative and provided some arguments against our derivation of condensation-induced pressure gradients.

We saw that the conclusions of Referee 3 were based on a physical error. Within two days of receiving the decision, we wrote a response to their comments and sent to the Editor. We also asked to see the comments of Referee 2 on our revisions. We received a response within one hour of sending our message where the Editor informed us that the decision was final. The reason was formulated as follows: "Manuscripts are accepted only when all the reviewers are in agreement about publication. In your case, two of the reviewers (#2 and #3), both of whom are very well-respected, were strongly against publication." The Editor wished us luck in publishing our work elsewhere.

Based on this experience, we have the following concerns:

1. The scientific enterprise consists in finding new results. New results cannot be immediately appreciated by all members of the scientific community. Therefore, the role of Editor, as we understand it, is not to count voices *pro* and *contra* of referees about a new result, but to try to objectively evaluate the scientific truth with help of advice of experts in the field. A journal that would employ the policy of publishing papers if only ALL referees agree will certainly be losing a good proportion of ground-breaking results submitted to it. We have never heard of such policies in any

mainstream journals. If it is indeed the official policy of GRL, this should be publicly announced such that the authors know that the fate of their submissions is ultimately decided by arithmetic vote of the referees rather than by scientific logic. We would appreciate a clarification on this point from the Journal – have indeed all papers published in GRL been approved by ALL involved reviewers? This would make an extraordinary case in scientific literature.

2. Despite the promise of the Editor that our reply was to be shown to Referee 2, we feel that it never was. We did not receive any further feedback from Referee 2. While the Editor informed us that this referee was ‘strongly against our work’, we did not receive any proof of this strongly negative attitude. We requested to see the comments of Referee 2 in our last letter to the Editor, but our request was not answered.

3. The Editor mentioned that both referees were ‘very well-respected’. This is highly disturbing. This confirms our concerns that the decision regarding our paper was based not on the quality of scientific arguments, but on the reputation of *who* delivered these arguments. As a strategy, it makes it possible to accept the arguments of well-respected scientists and ignore the arguments of less respected ones, making the category of ‘respect’ the rule of thumb in publication policies. This is clearly unacceptable in science. In our particular case, it appears to us that the Editor felt uncomfortable about going against the well-respected figures in his community to such a degree that he chose not to bother them altogether with our response(s) to their comments. This suggests to us that the peer-review procedure in GRL may not stand on the guard of scientific objectivity as firmly as it clearly should in a world-leading climate journal. This also suggests to us that the adopted procedures do not protect the Editors from the social pressure of the community, especially when a controversy arises (which should not be a rare case in a journal intended to publish ground-breaking research).

Upon receiving our response to the criticisms of Referee 3, the Editor wished us luck in publishing our work elsewhere. This means that the Editor was not convinced by the arguments of the referee (no scientist would wish good luck for publishing a paper he is convinced is flawed.) In summary, we feel that the Editor was genuinely interested in our work, but was not enabled by the peer-review practices adopted in the Journal to concentrate on science alone, without looking at social issues, when forming the decision.

Our team of authors is multi-national and spans three continents. One of us is Editor-in-Chief of an Elsevier journal. With all the different cultural backgrounds we have, all of us, as scientists, were equally disturbed and worried by this GRL experience. We would very much appreciate a feedback from the Journal regarding our concerns. Please, note that we would like to reserve the right to place this exchange in the public domain. We do feel that the transparency and quality of climate science is an issue of exceptional importance with direct implications for the lives of all people.

We appreciate the efforts the Journal takes for improving the peer-review standards and we hope our feedback could be useful for the Journal.

Yours very sincerely,  
Anastassia Makarieva

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1. Was your article  
rejected

2. Please rank the following aspects for your recent Geophysical Research Letters article and for your most recent submission to a non-AGU journal. If you have not published in non-AGU journal, please complete the rankings for Geophysical Research Letters only.

Have you published in a non-AGU journal? Yes

Title of non-AGU journal you are comparing:  
Physics Letters A

Using the following rankings, please enter the number that most closely matches your opinion. Feel free to add any comments, but do provide your numeric score for comparison with other authors' rankings.

Rankings: 5 = excellent; 4 = good; 3 = neutral; 2 = somewhat displeased; 1 = very displeased.

Ease of the submission process:

5 AGU Journal

5 Non-AGU Journal

Contact with editor's office:

5 AGU Journal

5 Non-AGU Journal

Speed of review process:

5 AGU Journal

5 Non-AGU Journal

Reviewers were knowledgeable about the area of my paper:

5 AGU Journal

5 Non-AGU Journal

Reviewers provided useful, constructive criticism:

2 AGU Journal

5 Non-AGU Journal

Clarity of instructions:

1 AGU Journal

5 Non-AGU Journal

3. What did you like best about the online submission system (GEMS)?  
the technical staff was helpful and quick in responding

4. What did you find most difficult about GEMS?  
during re-submission, some formal technical errors arose which delayed the ms delivery to the Editor by a couple of days. I did not understand either the source of these errors, or how they were ultimately resolved (by the staff). I just followed the instructions sent by the staff.

5. Do you expect to submit other papers to Geophysical Research Letters?  
Yes

6. Considering the entire review process, what do you think is the most important improvement that AGU could make for this journal?  
please, see the letter above

----- Original Message -----

From: "Author Survey\_Reviews" <[pubmatters@agu.org](mailto:pubmatters@agu.org)>

To: <[elba@peterlink.ru](mailto:elba@peterlink.ru)>

Sent: Wednesday, August 11, 2010 11:53 PM

Subject: AGU Author Survey\_Reviews Manuscript #2010GL043834R

> Final Decision Sent Date: 07/27/10

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> Dear Dr. Makarieva:

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> You recently received a final decision on Manuscript #2010GL043834R. The Editors

> and Publications Committee would appreciate your taking the time to complete

> this survey regarding your experience with the review process for this article.

> Your comments will help us to improve AGU journals and service to authors.

> We want to know your opinions whether or not your article will be published by

> AGU. If your article has been accepted for publication, you will be sent a short

> questionnaire about the production process later. Please complete this survey

> as soon as possible, as it is important to have your thoughts while they are

> fresh.

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> If you have completed a GEMS review survey for another paper in the last few

> months and your evaluation of the experience has not changed, please disregard

> this request. If your experience for this paper was better or worse than the

> previous one, please complete this survey.

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- > Unless you request otherwise, your comments will not be attributed to you individually.
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- > 1. Was your article
  - >  accepted
  - >  rejected
  - >  withdrawn
- >
- > 2. Please rank the following aspects for your recent Geophysical Research Letters article and for your most recent submission to a non-AGU journal. If you have not published in non-AGU journal, please complete the rankings for Geophysical Research Letters only.
- >
- > Have you published in a non-AGU journal?  Yes  No
- >
- > Title of non-AGU journal you are comparing:
- >
- > Using the following rankings, please enter the number that most closely matches your opinion. Feel free to add any comments, but do provide your numeric score for comparison with other authors' rankings.
- >
- > Rankings: 5 = excellent; 4 = good; 3 = neutral; 2 = somewhat displeased; 1 = very displeased.
- >
- > Ease of the submission process:
  - >  AGU Journal
  - >  Non-AGU Journal
- > Contact with editor's office:
  - >  AGU Journal
  - >  Non-AGU Journal
- > Speed of review process:
  - >  AGU Journal
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- > Reviewers were knowledgeable about the area of my paper:
  - >  AGU Journal
  - >  Non-AGU Journal
- > Reviewers provided useful, constructive criticism:
  - >  AGU Journal
  - >  Non-AGU Journal
- > Clarity of instructions:
  - >  AGU Journal
  - >  Non-AGU Journal
- >
- > 3. What did you like best about the online submission system (GEMS)?
- >
- >
- > 4. What did you find most difficult about GEMS?
- >
- >
- > 5. Do you expect to submit other papers to Geophysical Research Letters?

> \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

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> 6. Considering the entire review process, what do you think is the most important

> improvement that AGU could make for this journal?

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> Thank you for your time. Your opinion is important to us.

> AGU's Publications Committee and Editors

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