Reviewer's report

Title: Adjusting for under-identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander births in time series produced from birth records: using record linkage of survey data and administrative data sources

Version: 1 Date: 24 April 2012

Reviewer: John Bass

Reviewer's report:

I would like to take this opportunity to say how glad I am that you have done this particular study. It's long overdue; well done!

Major Compulsory Revisions

None

Minor Essential Revisions

(1) The totals in tables 1 and 2 are wrong in several cases:
   Table 1 Total of first row is 18,000, should be 18,040
   Table 1 Total of first column is 16,400, should be 16,420
   Table 1 Grand total is a different value, either by adding across or by adding down
   Table 2 Total of first row (WAACHS) is 8,990, should be 9,000
   Table 2 Total of second column (WAACHS) is 2,100, should be 2,110.
   Table 2 Grand total (WAACHS) is 13,700, should be 13,710
   Table 2 Total of first row (Midwive's) is 8,990, should be 8,980
   Table 2 Total of second column (Midwive's) is 10,630, should be 10,620
   Table 2 Grand total (Midwive's) is 13,700, should be 13,690

   I can see no obvious errors in the other tables, but in view of those listed above, they should all be checked again.

(2) There is a formatting error in the references. The first eleven have the title in italics, but the remainder have the title bold (and not italicised).

Discretionary revisions

(1) This study not only shows that under-ascertainment is quite significant, but also that it is biased (for instance, resulting in an improvement in the proportions of low birth weight and low gestational age births). I think you should seriously consider making this point in your conclusions. You do have it in your
abstract but only at the end of your results section, where it doesn’t stand out. I am of the firm opinion that you should broadcast it loudly!

(2) Did you consider looking to see how many births there were in the WAACHS collection districts that were recorded as Aboriginal or Torres Strait in the administrative collections, but not included in the survey? It probably would be very few, but I (for one) would be very interested to know how many did show up.

(3) [very minor, just me being picky] On page 8 the reference "[8]" confused me for a while. Perhaps it would be better positioned earlier, for example "In Australia a standard question has been developed for ascertaining Indigenous status [8]."?

(4) Should the word "Indigenous" really start with a capital 'I' all the time?

(5) A personal comment. My own experience with midwives forms was mainly prior to 2000. In that time I spoke with many midwives, and my strong impression was that aboriginality was largely filled in according to the appearance of the mother. This was the case in WA and SA, and I must confess I can’t remember much about the Tasmanian data (which in my case was from the early 1980’s); I suspect it was because they largely ignored the topic.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.