Reviewer's report

Title: Birth registration rates in New South Wales

Version: 1 Date: 7 August 2012

Reviewer: James Chalmers

Reviewer's report:

This is an important and interesting piece of work which highlights a deficiency in registration which is likely to be particularly relevant for the specific area studied, but also reminds the wider readership of the importance of complete and accurate birth registration.

Covering the specific points in turn:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

Yes, there is a clear description of the aim in the title and the abstract, and in the Background section of the paper

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

The methods are appropriate but before publication, the Methods section needs to be expanded to discuss the generation of the “risk groups”. The concept of “risk groups” is first introduced in the Results section, with only a sentence in the Methods section which states “The factors associated with registration rates were entered into a logistic regression model.”. It would therefore be useful to have more detail of the factors which were considered likely to be important, based on published literature and local knowledge, and also some more detail of the approach to building the regression model. It is difficult to judge the statistical worth of this paper without such detail and there is an argument for asking for statistical review once this is done. However, I think that the regression is quite straightforward and this is probably not necessary.

3. Are the data sound?

Yes, and well described. Tables 2 and 3 should have more informative titles to avoid confusion – Table 3 should refer to the fact that it provides information about adjusted odds.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

Yes

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
Yes, but we need a bit more discussion about whether the midwives data collection (MDC) tool is likely to be satisfactorily complete itself. It is used as the “gold standard” to which the civil registration system (RBDM) is compared but this deserves more discussion and justification. There should also be more detail of the relationship between the two systems. We are told that “Hospitals and birth clinics notify state registries of recent births on a regular basis” but we need to know if this is statutory, and how is it done.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Yes, but see comments in (5) above.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes, but see comments in (2) above.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
The abstract is fine but the title should convey the notion of relatively poor registration rates.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes, it is clear and readable.

- Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

Provision of more detail in the Methods section relating to risk “groups” (see (2) above), and also the regression modelling.

Discussion of the likely completeness of the MDC and the way that it relates to the RBDM, such as the mechanism of hospitals notifying the RBDM that a birth has happened. (see (5) above).

- Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Tables 2 and 3 should have more informative titles to avoid confusion – Table 3 should refer to the fact that it provides information about adjusted odds.

The title should convey the notion of relatively poor registration rates.

- Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
None

**Level of interest**: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests