Reviewer's report

Title: Alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking and the risk of subtypes of head-neck cancer: results from the Netherlands Cohort Study

Version: 1
Date: 12 December 2013
Reviewer: julien berthiller

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The question is correctly posed by the author and the scientific and methodological interest is correctly stated.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
The methods are extremely well described and detailed. Each step of the process of data collection, data management, analysis plan and decision rules regarding the variables are well described and justified.

3. Are the data sound?
The source (cancer registry and Dutch municipal population of the data state for its quality.

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 discussion and conclusion are correctly supported by data. However, some data collected with the food frequency questionnaire as well as family history of cancer are presented in the method and at the bottom of table 1 but are not explained in the results section neither in the discussion. As potential factors associated with HNC they should be discussed.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Limitations are clearly stated in the manuscript. The lack of power as a possible explanation for not significant results should be stressed a bit more.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Yes perfectly
9. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes, the writing is acceptable

- Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore) Might be interesting to discuss the RR of HNC for smokers among non-drinkers and for drinkers among non-smokers

- Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct) In the result section, RR for former smoker should not be stated as associated with HNC overall (CI [0.97-2.14] In the same section, info for frequency and duration for smoking should be referred to a table.

The flow chart should be numbered and referenced in the method section

- Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached) Make a decision regarding the use of food variable and family history of cancer: either you exclude it from the method section or you include it in the results and discussion section.

Finally Well conducted study. Well written paper. Topic not original but added strong information to the research on HNC.

I would suggest to accept this paper after corrections.