Author's response to reviews

Title: Are we there yet? Australian road safety targets and road traffic crash fatalities

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editors

In regards to our submitted manuscript ‘Are we there yet? Australian road safety targets and road traffic crash fatalities’, in this Cover Letter we would like to respond to the issues raised by the 2nd Reviewer.

1. The reviewer suggests that it would be beneficial if the rationale for the paper (i.e., that road safety targets are reviewed and publicly considered) is presented more succinctly. To address this, an additional paragraph has been formed (the final paragraph of the Background Section) which solely presents the rationale of the study.

2. The reviewer suggests that some of the assumptions underlying the analysis and interpretations should be better explained.

   a. He notes that (given the way the paper was written) it appears that it was expected that each state/territory would make an equal contribution towards the target being achieved. He suggests that the national target could be considered as the collective for the nation that takes into account the differences across the states/territories. We thank him for raising this issue and to acknowledge it we have restructured paragraphs in the Background Section. There is now a paragraph on the national strategy, and a subsequent paragraph that considers the states and territories of Australia and the variation in road safety outcomes across these jurisdictions. In this subsequent paragraph we noted that it is likely that the national rate was devised taking into account regional differences. Also, in the ‘Aims’ paragraph of the Background Section, the rationale for analysing state and territory-specific trends is given. As part of this it is noted that the national target provides a benchmark against which the progress of individual jurisdictions can be assessed. Also, in various places (the Abstract, Background, Discussion) the (previous) emphasis in the paper on when each state and territory would achieve the national target rate has been reduced through rewording and restructuring (as indicated by track changes).

   b. The reviewer suggests that the limitations associated with predicting future rates should be addressed in a more pre-emptive way i.e., in the justification of the approach rather than in a post hoc way in the Discussion. This point has
been addressed in 2 ways. First, a brief comment acknowledging limitations in the approach has been included in Abstract. Second, a paragraph has been included in the Background Section (2nd last paragraph) identifying the 2 main limitations of the approach (which were previously first explained in the Discussion Section). Given the relevance of the limitations to the study, a discussion on modelling issues/limitations has been maintained in the Discussion.

c. The reviewer advises that a specific discussion of causation issues would strengthen the conclusion of the paper. The issue that causal factors (and not past trends) will determine future RTC rates and therefore whether or not safety targets are met has been addressed in 2 ways. First, to clarify the role of causal factors some of the specific initiatives found to have been effective in reducing RTCs (e.g. seat belts) have been identified at the beginning of the study (2nd paragraph of the Background section). And, a short paragraph has been added at the end of the Discussion clarifying that causative variables will determine future RTC rates and therefore also whether safety targets are met.

3. The reviewer suggests that a brief discussion of the strengths/weakness of the data used is included. This has been added at the beginning of the Methods section.

We have also amended our “Competing Interests” declaration. Although the authors do not believe that competing interests actually exist, we decided that it would be prudent to declare that one of the centres (i.e., CONROD) we are affiliated with receives state government funding from the third-party insurance regulator in our state (albeit at arms-length via The University of Queensland). Although we are convinced that no real conflict of interest exists, we have included this statement to safeguard against any allegation of undeclared conflicts.

Apart from responding to the reviewer’s comments, other changes made to the manuscript include some changes in expression, changes to the Abstract so that it adheres to the word limit, and some other rearranging the content due to the revisions. The changes are highlighted by track changes.

We hope we have adequately addressed the reviewer’s concerns. Thank you for your consideration of our paper.

Sincerely,

Susan Gargett