Reviewer's report

Title: Identification and quantification of change in Australian illicit drug markets

Version: Date: 17 November 2005

Reviewer: Emma J Wadsworth

Reviewer's report:

General

This article addresses the question of whether the sudden collapse in the heroin market in Australia in early 2001 was a natural part of a cycle, or the result of independent events. It is concise, well written, and adds to the interesting current debate in this area.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

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

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. Generally, the Tables and Figures were well presented and labelled. However, Figures 1 and 2 might be clarified if: in Figure 1 the outliers in the plot with all 17 series were labelled as break and enter dwelling and steal from motor vehicle; and in Figure 2 a marker was added at about month 50.
2. The authors acknowledge in the Background section that information about the collapse is crucial to understanding the driving forces in the illicit drug market, and in addition that this information is important for drug policy makers. They go on to point out that they answer this important question, and identify the scale over which significant changes occur in the data series. It would be interesting if the Discussion section returned to these areas in more detail, for example by describing how the findings suggesting that reduced heroin availability was due to a separate non-random shock, and that there was evidence of epidemic behaviour, might be important for policy making.

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

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