Reviewer’s report

**Title:** Is peer review useful in assessing research proposals in Indigenous health? A case study

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 5 June 2008

**Reviewer:** Helen Barnes

**Reviewer’s report:**

This paper is well written and provides interesting and valuable qualitative data, illuminating issues around peer review. I would suggest a few discretionary revisions.

1. It would be useful to have more context of Australian review processes and assessment so the reader can place participant comments within this environment; for example p10 comment re single expert, does this happen, in what situations; CRCAH what is its role; how is peer review a part of this?

2. I would also like a bit more description of the participants; indigenous, experiences with peer review in different contexts?

3. Paragraph at bottom of p10 “Reservations about relying on a single etc…” expand a bit on conflicting demands.

4. Could the authors expand a bit on what is meant by a collaborative system; presumably the role of reviewer would shift in a collaborative system, with the implication that this is about more than research, academic, service provider relationships, and is systemic, organisational? It is suggested that the funder becomes something of a broker, so there may be issues around the organisational role given power imbalances; this would be interesting to hear more about. What is the form, composition of the developmental system suggested; what role would, for example, CRCAH play under this – who decides who is involved and how, who sets this system up; who controls the process?

5. Discussion introduces quite a bit of new material, some of it may be useful in the introductory section and a bit more discussion of some of the implications here e.g. discussion highlights issue of a small number of stakeholders to draw on; when they are involved in this way they are also being asked to operate within a system that may not be of their construction and may be hostile; also implications of collaborative and developmental systems (see previous point).

6. Discussion: I was interested in the suggestion of a wider range of reviewers; does this not happen in Australia? In some places it is not uncommon to have committees including community people, non-academics with particular expertise etc e.g. community based health workers (e.g. HRC NZ); this has its own issues in terms of weighting of opinion, still operating under dominant paradigms and criteria for assessment; indigenous knowledge and approaches are still
marginalised. Some comments on the implications of this suggestion would be interesting.

7. Conclusions section mentions reception by policy makers, but paper appears to focus largely on practitioners.

8. Conclusions also seem to miss out the strong theme in the paper around a developmental system.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

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