Author’s response to reviews

Title: Stepwise approach for the control and eventual elimination of Taenia solium as a public health problem

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Cecilia Devoto,

Thank you for your email and for forwarding the reviewer comments. We were very surprised to receive comments from so many reviewers. We were equally surprised to learn that the initial two reviewers had conflicts of interest, which have led to the current scenario. First, we do not understand why the decision to discount these reviewers appeared to have been made so late in the process and secondly, we are still a little bemused as to why these reviews were discounted in the first case. Would you mind expanding on this and explaining how the situation came about?

We are aware that one of the previous reviewers (Safari Kinung’hi) has previously co-authored manuscripts with one of us (Pascal Magnussen). We are surprised that this would have been considered a conflict of interest (if indeed it is the reason, we cannot see any other links between the initial reviewers and the authors of the current manuscript). In our field, as with many, the majority of active scientists collaborate with each other to some degree, thus, making it virtually
impossible to identify completely unconnected, sufficiently qualified reviewers. Acknowledging this, we believe that respected scientists will do their upmost to be impartial on any review process and should the connection be too close to make this possible then a conflict of interest would be declared. Having been in similar situations on numerous occasions (reviewing work for someone who has at some point been a co-author), we all strongly believe this would be the case in this instance.

Whatever the reason for the decision to change reviewers, our biggest concern and regret was the time taken to inform us of this decision and the time and effort invested in the process.

On a different note, we feel that there has in general, been a misconception about what constitutes a ‘debate’ paper. We perceive a paper of this kind to be the authors considered opinion of the best possible way forward. Reviewers, however, appear to dislike the statement of an opinion which is either not yet citable in the literature, or that is out of line with the reviewers personal stance. The result appears to be a manuscript, which is in full consensus with the reviewers prior to publication, taking (to some degree) the aspect of ‘debate’ out of the exercise. Could you please clarify the journals stand on this?

Overall, we do not feel that we have been treated fairly and transparently in this process. All of us have previous experience of the peer-review process (from both sides), and several of us serve on editorial boards elsewhere, and we feel that the process up until now has taken far too long and been overall unacceptable.

That said, we are pleased to address the comments raised by the new reviewers, which you will find attached. We do hope that you will keep the above raised points in mind when making your final decision and will see to it that the review process happens at a more rapid pace than what has been the case so far.

With kind regards on behalf of all co-authors,

Dr Uffe Christian Braae, corresponding author