Reviewer's report

Title: Factors contributing to the effectiveness of health impact assessments in Australia and New Zealand

Version: 2  Date: 8 April 2015

Reviewer: Margaret Douglas

Reviewer's report:

Review of Haigh et al. Factors contributing to the effectiveness of HIA in Australia and NZ

Thank you for asking me to review this paper. I think it is an interesting, well argued and useful paper that is based on well conducted research. I am happy to support its publication and have only a few suggestions for the authors to consider.

Discretionary revisions

1. In table 1 the authors note that they assessed all the 55 HIAs using the review package for HIA developed by Fredsgaard et al. It would be useful to comment on how the quality of the reports, assessed using this tool, related to the effectiveness of the HIAs.

2. A small point – in the introductory section on Results and discussion (line 156) the authors divide ‘Process related factors’ into ‘HIA features’ and ‘HIA process’, then at line 160 use the heading ‘HIA process’ to discuss both sets of characteristics. This is slightly confusing. It might be better simply to remove the bracketed terms HIA features and HIA process here.

3. In the section on community involvement the authors state that HIAs with community involvement were statistically significantly more likely to be effective. The data to support this statement are not shown, and should really be shown to justify the statement about statistical significance. But as this is essentially a qualitative analysis it might be better just to remove the words ‘statistically significantly’.

4. In the section on ‘proactive positioning’ some of the quotes suggest that some respondents were talking about buy-in for HIAs as the endpoint, rather than whether the HIAs made a difference to health. This is particularly the case in the last quote that finishes ‘. . . lets get HIA happening in some form’ (line 385). I feel uncomfortable reading this. It obviously relates to the issue in the paper that the definition of ‘success’ varies between stakeholders. But the point of research on the effectiveness of HIA is surely to show that HIA has (or doesn’t have) a benefit for health and is not just an end in itself. Mainstreaming of HIA in an organisation will obviously mean more HIAs are done, but this does not show whether or not mainstreaming increases their effectiveness in achieving other desired
outcomes. I think the authors could reflect on this in the discussion.

5. I like the recommendations for HIA practitioners in the conclusion. However I would probably separate affected communities from other stakeholders. It might also be worth highlighting that stakeholders should include people with decision making positions, people with knowledge of decision making processes, and also people with relevant skills.

**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.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests'