

Risks to Māori Data Sovereignty from Replacing the Census

Scrapping the Census in favour of an administrative data model (MDS/G) risks producing incomplete, biased data that misrepresents Māori communities. Unlike Census data, administrative datasets drawn from health, justice, and welfare systems are collected for operational purposes, not for equitable statistical representation. This violates the Māori Data Sovereignty principle of Obligations, which requires that data practices deliver meaningful benefits to Māori. As discussed in the guest lecture, these systems often perpetuate systemic bias and over-represent negative outcomes, leading to flawed evidence about Māori realities.

The approach also undermines **kaitiakitanga**, as it limits Māori control over their data, and conflicts with **rangatiratanga** the right to self-determination. The result is a statistical system that may invisibilize Māori, distort population counts, and lead to inequitable decisions in health, housing, education, and social services.

To mitigate these risks, Stats NZ must co-design the new data model with Māori, including organisations like **Te Kāhui Raraunga**. This partnership would ensure Māori governance, correct systemic biases, and align data practices with Māori values and needs. Upholding Māori Data Sovereignty requires that data systems support not harm **whānau**, **hapū**, and **iwi** by enabling accurate, empowering insights for collective wellbeing.