

MĀORI GOVERNANCE RISKS IN AN ADMINISTRATIVE CENSUS

Scrapping the traditional Census and shifting to administrative data raises significant risks for Māori Data Sovereignty and Governance (MDS/G). A core principle of MDS/G is that Māori must have authority over decisions about Māori data. The new Census model risks breaching this by proceeding without clear Māori partnership in its design. Unlike the traditional Census, administrative datasets are created for government operational needs, not necessarily to reflect Māori priorities such as iwi affiliation or cultural measures. If Māori are not consulted and given governance roles, the new approach could reproduce colonial patterns where decisions are made about Māori data without Māori involvement. This risks eroding trust in official statistics, limiting the relevance of data for Māori decision-making, and undermining the rangatiratanga of Māori over Māori data.

To mitigate this, Stats NZ should establish a formal Māori governance group with authority to oversee the design and use of the administrative Census. Co-governance structures would uphold the principles of Māori control and rangatiratanga, ensuring the new Census serves both national needs and adheres to Māori data principles.

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