Advice on Maori Data Sovereignty and the Census

The move from a full Census to an IDI model creates a serious risk for Māori data sovereignty and governance. The main concern is the loss of reliable, self-reported iwi and language data. The Census has been the only standardised source where Māori can directly identify iwi affiliation, te reo use, and household conditions. These are not consistently or accurately collected in the admin datasets, where iwi data is optional, inconsistently coded, and language absent.

This undermines key principles of Māori data sovereignty.

- Rangatiratanga – Māori authority over Māori data
- Whakapapa – ensuring data has clear origins and context

Without this data, Māori cannot exercise tino rangatiratanga over how they are counted or represented. It also threatens iwi resource allocation, Te Tirti settlements, and the ability to target health, housing, and education services.

To mitigate this, Stats NZ should partner with iwi and Māori organisations such as Te Mana Rarauga (Māori Data Sovereignty Network) to co-design how Māori data is collected and used. The Maori Data Governance Model (2023) discussed by Chris Cormack provides a strong foundation. A key recommendation is a Chief Māori Data Steward alongside the Crown's Chief Data Steward. This dual system will uphold rangatiratanga and whakapapa, ensuring data is used with proper context and integrity.