

Advice to the Government Statistician

Replacing the traditional Census with an administrative-data model poses significant risks for Māori. Census data has long enabled Māori to self-identify iwi, hapū, and descent. Administrative datasets, however, were not designed with Māori priorities in mind and often exclude/misclassify crucial identity information. If this shift occurs without safeguards, Māori populations risk diminished visibility in national statistics, undermining their ability to plan for services, exercise tino rangatiratanga, and pursue social, cultural, and economic wellbeing.

Article 2 of *te Tiriti o Waitangi* guarantees Māori authority over their taonga, which includes data. Treating administrative records as a substitute for Census data risks breaching these obligations by concentrating control within Crown systems rather than enabling Māori governance of Māori data. Without accurate, self-determined data, inequities may deepen and trust in official statistics could be hindered.

To mitigate these risks, a new Census should be co-designed with Māori governance bodies, embed mechanisms for self-identification of ethnicity, descent, and iwi, and be supported by investment in Māori-led data systems. Upholding principles of rangatiratanga, kaitiakitanga, and accountability will ensure Māori remain visible in official statistics and that government meets its Treaty responsibilities.

Word Count: 185