

Advice on Census Changes and Māori Data Sovereignty

Moving away from a traditional Census towards an administrative data model creates real risks for Māori Data Sovereignty (MDS). One of the biggest concerns is around Rangatiratanga (Authority). Māori have the right to control how Māori data is collected and used, but most administrative systems were never designed with Māori priorities in mind. They often lack key details such as iwi affiliation or descent. Without these, the visibility of Māori in national statistics could shrink, making it harder for iwi and hapū to plan for their people and for government to meet Treaty responsibilities.

This also affects Whakapapa (Relationships). Data is not just numbers, whereas it carries genealogical and cultural connections. If the new Census approach weakens these links, it could undermine the ability of Māori to make good decisions now and for future generations.

The way forward is not to build the model with Māori leadership. Stats NZ should work in partnership with iwi and Māori data experts to shape the new model, ensure disaggregation by iwi, and establish Māori led oversight. This would uphold Kaitiakitanga (Guardianship) and protect Māori interests while still modernising the Census.