

Critique

UPHOLDING MĀORI DATA SOVEREIGNTY IN THE ABSENCE OF A TRADITIONAL CENSUS

The replacement of the full enumeration Census with an administrative-data-driven model presents a significant risk to Māori Data Sovereignty (MDS), particularly the principle of *rangatiratanga*—the right of Māori to exercise authority over their own data. The traditional Census enabled Māori to assert identity through self-determined expressions of whakapapa, iwi affiliation, and ethnicity. These identifiers are frequently absent, inconsistently recorded, or misrepresented in administrative datasets, which were not designed with Māori purposes or tikanga in mind. The erosion of these identifiers not only compromises data quality but also undermines Māori capability to exercise *mana motuhake* in planning, governance, and accountability.

Furthermore, failure to engage Māori in the design and governance of the new system would breach the MDS principle of *mana whakahaere*, which emphasises Māori control over the processes and systems that shape their data realities. Without robust consultation, the transition risks reproducing structural inequities under the guise of efficiency.

To mitigate this, Stats NZ must initiate a co-governance framework with iwi and Māori data leadership, ensuring that administrative data systems are restructured to uphold Māori values and priorities. Inclusion of Māori-led data sources into the IDI is essential to maintain both data integrity and the legitimacy of official statistics.