**Protect Māori Authority: Stop Reducing Identity to Numbers**

Replacing the Census with administrative datasets through the IDI raises a serious risk to Māori Data Sovereignty. A key principle is rangatiratanga—Māori authority over Māori data. Census data has historically allowed Māori to self-identify in terms of ethnicity, iwi, and whakapapa. Administrative data, collected for state purposes, risks treating Māori data as isolated points rather than connected histories, undermining whakapapa and perpetuating data colonialism.

The consequences are significant. Undercounting or misclassification prevents iwi from exercising authority in decision-making. Without trusted, self-determined data, inequities in funding, services, and governance deepen, while Māori trust in Stats NZ diminishes. Communities may be misrepresented, and policies risk failing to address their actual needs, further entrenching systemic inequities.

To address these risks and uphold rangatiratanga, a critical safeguard is ensuring Māori identity in the Census is based on self-identification, not biological measures such as DNA. Identity is grounded in whakapapa, cultural belonging, and lived experience. For instance, a child of Samoan descent raised in a Māori whānau and immersed in its customs should be able to identify as Māori if they choose. Embedding Māori-defined categories protects the integrity of Māori data, strengthens cultural representation, and ensures equitable, accurate outcomes.