**Advice on Māori Data Sovereignty and the Census**

Replacing the Census with administrative data risks leaving Māori in a waka they do not steer. Administrative datasets were not designed with Māori priorities in mind, meaning essential whakapapa details: iwi, hapū, descent, may be missing or inconsistently recorded. This breaches the principle of kaitiakitanga, where those collecting and storing data are obliged to act as careful guardians of taonga. If Māori are not in control of the waka, their data risks being misused or interpreted without tikanga, deepening mistrust in state-led statistics.

To address this, Stats NZ should establish a Māori-led governance rōpū to co-design how Census functions within the Integrated Data Infrastructure. This would ensure the waka is steered collectively, guided by *rangatiratanga* (authority) and *manaakitanga* (respect and care), while also protecting whakapapa as a living taonga. Embedding *whanaungatanga* in the design process ensures relationships and obligations to iwi and hapū are upheld. By recognising Māori authority in both data collection and use, Stats NZ can shift from passive ownership to active guardianship. In doing so, the new Census can chart a course that honours Māori sovereignty, builds trust, and still delivers innovation that benefits the wider whānau of Aotearoa.

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