**Written Advice on Māori Data Governance and Sovereignty**

Removing the census in favour of IDI data may look like an efficient, cheaper alternative, but it poses risks to Māori communities. New Zealand is obliged to adhere to Māori Data Sovereignty, but the use of IDI data violates the MDS principle of Kotahitanga, which means that collection and analysis of Māori data should benefit Māori.

Māori Data Sovereignty means Māori should have ownership, control and management over Māori data. Māori data is digital/digitisable knowledge from Māori people, language, culture, resources or environments.

A risk of removing the census is inaccurate Māori population counts. The census counts ethnicity, descent and iwi affiliation. In the 2023 census, 16% of Māori didn’t identify ethnically as Māori, which means that the type of population count used is crucial, as this determines funding for Māori resources, such as education and healthcare. Descent is generally considered as a more accurate count of Māori population, but using the IDI to quantify the Māori descent population is problematic because of historical miscounts. This is because before 1998, birth certificates only considered people above a threshold of Māori ancestry as Māori. Therefore, the IDI may underestimate the Māori population, leading to lack of funding for Māori, and thus violating Kotahitanga.

A solution is to consult with iwi, and use Māori-led data solutions to determine population counts. By putting Māori data in Māori hands, there is no bias in data analysis, and the whakapapa of the data is understood.