



TE MANA
RARAUNGA
Māori Data Sovereignty Network

Te Mana Raraunga Statement on 2018 New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings

Monday 29 April 2019

Census 2018 data limitations are a brake on Māori social, cultural and economic wellbeing

‘The limitations of the Census 2018 Māori data are an unacceptable brake on efforts to advance Māori social, cultural and economic wellbeing that cannot be allowed to happen again’ says Te Mana Raraunga – the Māori Data Sovereignty Network. ‘As we predicted, it appears that the Census has not delivered equitably for Māori’.

Official statistics are fundamental for informing Māori and Crown actions to improve Māori wellbeing and realise Māori rights. The delay in the release of data until September 2019 is a major concern as timeliness is a key factor in the usefulness of data to inform decisions.

Today’s announcement that Census 2018 counts for Māori ethnicity and Māori descent are ‘likely to be more comprehensive’ than those from the Census 2013 sounds promising. However, the Census 2013 had the lowest Māori coverage of any recent Census, so this improvement is off a low base. Moreover, the Census 2018 dataset was only achievable by drawing extensively on other government data after it became apparent that the Census enumeration was a failure.

Stats NZ notes that 11 percent of the total number of records in the dataset that it created for Census 2018 have come from other government data. We urge Stats NZ to be forthcoming about what percent of Māori ethnicity and Māori descent records in the Census 2018 dataset have been sourced from outside the Census. This information is important, given that that Māori descent data are used to calculate the number of electorates and revise electoral boundaries which Stats NZ says ‘are robust’ and have been subject to ‘extensive testing’. It is also important because Māori are likely to be disproportionately affected by this new process, but have had no say in its design or implementation. It would appear to be yet another example of a decision made about us, but without us.

The change in Census methodology to include a much wider use of government data has implications beyond Te Ao Māori. Most New Zealanders may be unaware that their name and address are retained when they complete the Census and that those details are used, along with other information, to link to other government data for statistical purposes. There has not yet been a wider public conversation about the acceptability of using individual’s information in this way. We do agree with Stats NZ that openness and transparency is critical to maintaining public trust and the integrity of the Census.

The most disappointing news from Stats NZ’s press release is that Census 2018 has failed to deliver robust data for iwi. For many iwi, the census is the only source of reliable socio-economic and

demographic data about their people. Thus this failure is an unacceptable outcome that diminishes the efforts of iwi that took part in the Stats NZ iwi classification review in the lead-up to Census 2018, and those that have engaged directly with Stats NZ in an attempt to access iwi data. The absence of robust or even comparable iwi statistics will be an impediment to iwi self-determination and planning for the future. As such, it should be considered as a potential breach of the Crown's Treaty of Waitangi obligations, as well as a potential breach of the government's obligations as a signatory to the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The United Nations has noted the role of states to provide data for Indigenous peoples. It is vital that these data are of the same depth and quality as that for other population groups, so as not to reinforce existing inequities. Today's announcement does not provide us with an assurance that this is the case.

We look forward to the full and timely release of the Census Review panel's report to inform the work towards a high quality Census process in the future. We also look forward to receiving more information about the quality of data from Census 2018 pertaining to Māori household and families and our national taonga, te reo Māori. These areas are of particular importance because, like iwi data, they are extremely difficult to source reliably and consistently outside of the Census.

Ensuring that Census 2023 delivers for Māori will require the application of Māori data sovereignty and Māori data governance to Census processes as well as to the official statistics system as a whole.

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About Te Mana Raraunga: Te Mana Raraunga, the Māori Data Sovereignty Network, brings together more than 100 Māori researchers, practitioners and entrepreneurs across the research, IT, community and NGO sectors. TMR advocates for Māori rights and interests in data and for the development of Māori, iwi and hapū data infrastructure and capability.

www.temanararaunga.maori.nz

Contact : Andrew Sporle

a.sporle@auckland.ac.nz

021 351868