



TE MANA RARAUNGA

Māori Data Sovereignty Network

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

A Call for Action on Māori Census Data

24 July 2018

Te Mana Raraunga, the Māori Data Sovereignty Network, is concerned that Census 2018 may fail to deliver high quality Māori and iwi data.

The Census of Population and Dwellings is the flagship of the Official Statistics System (OSS) and is essential for many of the functions that underpin democracy. Census data inform decisions about the resourcing of national, regional and community services and infrastructure, and form the basis of national, sub-national and ethnic population estimates and projections. The Government has a number of policy priorities including improving housing, child wellbeing and poverty reduction, all of which disproportionately impact Māori and Pacific peoples. Addressing these issues requires access to high quality and relevant data, including census data.

Interim figures for the 2018 Census released by Stats NZ indicate that full *or* partial information has only been received for around 90 percent of individuals. For Māori, the extent of the problem will inevitably be worse. We may well be looking at a total Māori response rate of less than 80 percent, and even lower in areas that have historically had lower coverage, such as Northland and the East Coast. Census 2018 may yet turn out to be the poorest quality enumeration of Māori in recent history.

There are a number of implications, one of which is constitutional. The census count of the Māori descent population is part of a statutory formula used to determine the boundaries and number of Māori electorates. The number of Māori electoral districts also depends on the number of Māori who choose, during the Māori Electoral Option period, to be registered on the Māori electoral roll. If Māori descendants are missing in large numbers from Census 2018, this will reduce the size of the Māori electoral population and, potentially, the number of electorates.

Stats NZ's plan for dealing with low response rates is to plug the data holes using statistical methods of imputation. Imputation involves inserting a value when a respondent has not provided a valid response. We have concerns about the extensive imputation that will be needed to deal with missing Māori descent, Māori ethnicity and iwi affiliation data in Census 2018. The statutory importance of Māori descent data calls for a high level of transparency and duty of care, including clarity over what level of imputation is acceptable for electoral purposes.

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High rates of Māori non-response could also compromise the quality of iwi data. For many iwi, the census is the only source of reliable socio-economic and demographic data about their people. Poor response rates would not only decrease iwi census counts but may also affect their composition (e.g., sex and age structure).

Te Mana Raraunga supports having a comprehensive external independent review of Census 2018 in order to understand the reasons for the lower than expected response rates, what went wrong, where, for whom and why.

Te Mana Raraunga also sees a critical need for Māori governance of Māori data across the Official Statistics System. Official statistics are a strategic resource for both national and Māori development - there is a common interest in ensuring that the census and other official data remain robust, relevant and trustworthy. A Māori data governance group would develop the principles and processes by which to sustainably govern Māori and iwi data through Treaty-based partnership.

Giving Māori a real say over how our data are collected, managed and analysed is essential for maintaining trust and confidence in the census and the OSS more broadly.

*A more detailed technical statement on Census 2018 can be found on the Te Mana Raraunga website: www.temanararaunga.maori.nz/panui/

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.

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