



## Communiqué from Hui Raraunga 2025

### Protecting and caring for Māori data as a taonga in a changing census environment

Māori data is a taonga.<sup>i</sup> As such, there are obligations on the Crown both to ensure its appropriate care and to work with Māori on all aspects of its collection, use, protection, storage, and dissemination. Recognising the potential and importance of data is also a core part of the Mana Ōrite Relationship Agreement signed in 2019 between the Data Iwi Leaders Group (operating as Te Kāhui Raraunga) and Stats NZ.<sup>ii</sup>

Launched in 2023, the *Māori Data Governance Model* (MDG Model)<sup>iii</sup> was co-designed with Māori data experts, users and the government for implementation across the government data system. The MDG Model provides direction and guidance for the system-wide governance of Māori data, based on culturally-grounded models of protection and care. This is consistent with the Government's responsibilities under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The MDG Model recognises the need for leadership, policies, regulatory and legal settings that ensure Māori can exercise authority over Māori data, reduce and ultimately eliminate unethical data use, and strengthens outcomes for individuals, whānau and communities.

The MDG Model must be central to Stats NZ's data policy and investment decisions, as both a party to the Mana Ōrite Relationship Agreement and as the Government's Chief Data Steward. However, changes are being made to census without proper regard to the MDG Model or to wider Māori data needs and priorities.

While there have been long-standing concerns with the Crown's approach to data, Māori have worked with Stats NZ to improve the five-yearly national census (which is a full enumeration survey). Over time, this has improved approaches to data collection and in the last census, improved iwi-Māori data quality, lifting the quality of the iwi affiliation variable from "Very poor" in 2018 to "Moderate" in 2023.

The census provides highly valued Māori variables to the Crown and to iwi-Māori. The Māori descent population is a key input to the setting of electoral boundaries. Te reo Māori data from the census informs priority actions, resourcing and monitoring for the government and iwi-Māori. For some iwi, the census is the only reliable source of iwi affiliation counts, used to help iwi understand where their uri are, and how they are doing, informing strategic plans and outcomes.<sup>iv</sup>

Stats NZ is replacing its five-yearly census with an approach that relies on administrative data collected by government agencies, an annual survey of a small sample of the population, and tailored solutions – such as targeted surveys for "priority" communities. These approaches will build in a bias that favours numerically dominant groups and will further invisibilise some Māori individuals, whānau, and communities, such as, takatāpui, and Māori with lived experience of

disability. It is also well established that full enumeration methods suit smaller populations, like iwi affiliation, better than the model being proposed.<sup>v</sup>

In a changing census environment, where the negative impacts of the change fall disproportionately on iwi-Māori, the MDG Model and Māori data priorities need to be driving the Crown's investment decisions. With this in mind, we call for:

- **Stats NZ to fully implement the MDG model immediately and in a meaningful and transparent way**, as an essential component of updating its approach to the census.
- **Stats NZ to ensure government data systems are trustworthy and have the confidence of Māori individuals, whānau and communities**, as the Government's Chief Data Steward and party to the Mana Ōrite Agreement. This requires mechanisms to ensure the quality of the data the government collects and holds, and assurances that the Crown only collects what it needs to and does not use the data in ways that cause harm.
- **Recognition from the Crown that Iwi-Māori data should be under the control and possession of Iwi-Māori.** Māori have our own tikanga that would provide more appropriate protection and care over our data. Exercising our authority in this way aligns with Māori mana motuhake and Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- **Mana motuhake data solutions to be prioritised.** This requires technical support and increased Crown Investment in Iwi-Māori data infrastructure, and repatriating Māori data held in government collections so they can be under appropriate Māori control and governance.
- **Stats NZ to explore options for Māori-led collection, storage, and use of Māori descent and iwi affiliation data.** This data is whakapapa data that is of high relevance and importance to Māori. This data does not belong in government collections. There are also serious concerns that alternative data sources to the census (such as electoral rolls, surveys and administrative data) will be of limited use for iwi decision-making and other Māori purposes.<sup>vi</sup>
- **Stats NZ to support an Iwi-Māori survey programme** that directly responds to and reflects Māori data needs and expectations and can produce insights grounded in local realities.

### About this communiqué

This communiqué has been developed following, Hui Raraunga 2025, a wānanga at Te Herenga Waka Marae, Victoria University on 13 November 2025. Hosted by Te Kāhui Raraunga, the wānanga was an opportunity for Māori data experts, Iwi leaders, data technicians, academics, and Māori data-led organisations to discuss the census changes and Māori data aspirations.

Attendees of Hui Raraunga 2025 included representatives from:

- Hineuru Iwi Trust
- Kahukuraariki Trust Board
- Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Centre of Research Excellence
- Ngā Waihua o Paerangi
- Ngāti Tamaterā Treaty Settlement Trust
- Rangitāmiro

- Rangitāne Tū Mai Rā
- Tamatea Pōkai Whenua
- Tanenuiārangi Manawatū Charitable Trust
- Te Kaahui o Rauru
- Te Mana Raraunga
- Te Ngira Institute for Population Research (University of Waikato)
- Te Rūnanga o Ngā Wairiki Ngāti Apa
- Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Awa
- Te Rūnanga o Te Whānau
- Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira
- Te Rūnanga o Whaingaroa
- Te Rūnanganui o Ngāti Porou
- Te Rūnanganui o Te Āti Awa
- Tūhono Trust
- Te Rōpū Rangahau Hauora a Eru Pōmare (University of Otago)
- Victoria University
- Waipapa Taumata Rau (University of Auckland)

Te Kāhui Raraunga Charitable Trust is an independent Māori body established in 2019 as the operational arm of the Data Iwi Leaders Group (Data ILG). Te Kāhui Raraunga advocates for and advances iwi-Māori data rights, interests and aspirations in Aotearoa New Zealand on behalf of the National Iwi Chairs Forum. Its aim is to “enhance the social, cultural, environmental, and economic well-being of Māori; to enable iwi, hapū and whānau Māori to access, collect and use Māori data.”<sup>vii</sup> Under the Mana Ōrite Relationship Agreement, Te Kāhui Raraunga and Stats NZ agree a joint work programme aimed at progressing priority actions towards meeting the data needs and aspirations of Iwi Māori.

## END NOTES

<sup>i</sup> Māori data is a taonga as it is a component of mātauranga Māori. For a discussion mātauranga Māori, refer to: Waitangi Tribunal (2011). *Ko Aotearoa Tēnei: A Report into Claims concerning New Zealand Law and Policy Affecting Māori Culture and Identity*. Legislation Direct, Wellington.

<sup>ii</sup> Data Iwi Leaders Group and Stats NZ (2019). *Mana Ōrite Relationship Agreement*. Available online [here](#).

<sup>iii</sup> Kukutai, T., Cambell-Kamariera, K., Mead, A., Mikaere, K., Moses, C., Whitehead, J., & Cormack, D. (2023). *Māori data governance model*. Te Kāhui Raraunga. Available online [here](#).

<sup>iv</sup> Internal Te Kāhui Raraunga document.

<sup>v</sup> Internal Te Kāhui Raraunga document.

<sup>vi</sup> Te Kāhui Tātai Tupuna (2022). *He Tatai Tupuna: Iwi Affiliation and the New Zealand Births, Deaths, and Marriages Record System*. Paper prepared for the Department of Internal Affairs. Available online [here](#).

<sup>vii</sup> Te Kāhui Raraunga. (2020). *Te Kāhui Raraunga*. Available online at [www.kahuiraraunga.io](http://www.kahuiraraunga.io)



**He kura ka huna, he kura ka whākina, e koropupū ana te wai ora!**

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