

MEDIA STATEMENT

13 April, 2022

Population underestimation may have had flow-on impact

Data ILG is disappointed in Stats NZ's findings about the 2013 Māori population underestimation, saying Stats NZ has failed to adequately answer whether the data could have negatively impacted Māori electoral seats.

On 8 April, Stats NZ released a report detailing its analysis and findings into the 2013 Māori population estimates, including confirmation that it underestimated the Māori population by up to 50,000 people in 2013. The underestimate was first noticed in 2020 and raised concerns about the accuracy of the Māori descent data in the 2013 census used to determine the number of Māori electoral seats. The report found that, under different scenarios, different Māori descent counts in the 2013 census could have translated to fewer or more Māori seats for both the 2014 and 2017 elections.

The report acknowledges the errors that led to the underestimation and Stats NZ has said that the issue should not occur again, with the greater use of administrative data for Māori population statistics.

However, Data ILG and its mahi arm, Te Kāhui Raraunga, remain concerned that Stats NZ has not sufficiently addressed its concerns that errors by the agency may have costed Māori additional representation in Parliament.

Data ILG Technician Professor Tahu Kukutai says while Stats NZ says the electoral calculations were done correctly, the numbers upon which the calculations were based could have produced a different outcome.

"The problem is that Stats NZ simply does not know whether the undercounting of Māori in the 2013 census could have cost an extra Māori seat.

"As with the 2018 Census, this brings into sharp focus the importance of quality data, and the disproportionate impact on Māori when it is not done correctly.

Professor Kukutai says problems with recent government data collections, have required experienced Māori data practitioners to augment and bolster the government data system to ensure that quality data informs our basic constitutional mechanisms, and meets iwi and Māori data needs. She says the time is right to start considering alternative data systems.

"There is so much opportunity for innovation in this space. We need to move toward more hybrid approaches that leverage Māori and iwi expertise and reduce our data dependence on government agencies."

Data ILG, through its Mana Ōrite agreement with Stats NZ, is committed to working with the agency to improve data quality and data governance for Māori.



Data ILG Chairman, Rahui Papa says the Mana Ōrite agreement creates a critical relationship between the Data ILG and the Crown.

“Data ILG has a network of experienced Māori data practitioners who advance critical kaupapa in Iwi and Māori data. Through the Mana Ōrite relationship, we work with government to ensure that government meets its own constitutional obligations and accountabilities, which includes meeting Iwi and Māori data needs.”

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