

Review of the Measurement of Ethnicity

Ethnicity Matters: Māori Perspectives

Executive Summary

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Māori perspectives paper for consultation

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Executive summary: Ethnicity matters - Māori perspectives paper

This paper presents a range of Māori views on the definition and measurement of ethnicity. The Review of the Measurement of Ethnicity provides an opportunity for Māori to articulate to the Crown, Māori requirements in respect of the statistics it collects, processes and disseminates within the framework of Treaty rights. In order to stimulate debate and encourage submissions to the review, areas for comment are suggested at the end of each section. These are not intended to be restrictive and comments on other relevant issues are welcome.

Māori as Tangata Whenua: The power to name and the power to claim

The sovereign right of tangata whenua to name individual and collective identities has been articulated in Māori and indigenous commentary. The right of Māori as tangata whenua to determine Māori individual and collective identities is endorsed by UN covenants, just as Māori status as tangata whenua is affirmed by the Treaty of Waitangi. Indigenous rights are distinguished from ‘minority rights’ and are not dependent on the numbers of Māori in the population. Even if there were only one Māori in the country, that one Māori would still have all the rights of indigenous peoples.

In general, the government seeks to meet the statistical needs of the total New Zealand population, within which Māori are seen as a subgroup. The statistical needs of Māori are usually subsumed within those of the total New Zealand population. This may be a problem if it conceals issues where Māori needs or risks are different from those of the total population. For example, the current Household Labour Force Survey is able to provide regular youth unemployment rates for the New Zealand population, but not for Māori youth even though the five-yearly census shows Māori youth unemployment to be higher.

Individual and collective identities

Central to tangata whenua identity is whakapapa. Whakapapa is used to connect with or differentiate oneself from others. Many view hapū and iwi identity as a prerequisite to Māori identity. “My being Māori is absolutely dependent on my history as a Tuhoe person as against being a Māori person” – John Rangihau.

However, while being identified by hapū or iwi is fundamental for some, it may be inaccessible for others. Also, some people with Māori ancestry may acknowledge their iwi but not identify their ethnicity as Māori. Others may have knowledge of their iwi but not view it as central to their identity or decide not to give that information to the Crown.

Māori express a range of identities in different contexts. Identity can be dependent on the situation and may develop or change over time. All these positions are valid and express the tangata whenua right to be able to name and claim individual and collective identities.

Crown influences on collective identities

Iwi information did not feature in official statistics for most of last century. Where iwi data was collected, for example on birth and death registration forms until 1995, this information was never analysed or published.

By the 1990s, the government policy agenda shifted to the ‘devolution’ of government services to iwi. This, together with Treaty settlements from claims such as the Fisheries claim, led to pressure to redefine iwi within a legal framework. For instance, Te Ohu Kaimoana has defined the characteristics of an iwi to which fisheries assets will be distributed. These characteristics include: descent from a tupuna, hapū, marae, belonging historically to a takiwā, and an existence traditionally acknowledged by other iwi.

The concern that urban or other contemporary Māori collectives will be excluded from accessing resources to support local Māori development has resulted in significant legal debate about the definition and identification of iwi, and perhaps more importantly, who has the power to name and claim Māori identities.

Crown potential to support Māori development

Iwi, hapū, and other Māori collective entities require good quality, comprehensive data to support planning and development. Many of these entities do not currently have the resources to collect their own statistics, and official statistics have significant potential for supporting iwi planning. Since 1991, Statistics New Zealand, through the census, has been monitoring the number of people with Māori descent who (a) know the name(s) of their iwi, and (b) belong to a list of officially recognised iwi. Statistical profiles of iwi, including those who live within the traditional rohe and those who live elsewhere, have been provided to iwi authorities.

The role of the Crown in collecting, analysing and disseminating iwi information needs further discussion. Issues of ownership and control of iwi data collected by the Crown, as well as intellectual property would be logical starting points. Furthermore, there has been little discussion or policy development about the use of iwi data collected by the Crown. For instance, the national health data set (including deaths, hospitalisations, cancer registrations etc) does not include iwi or hapū data, despite policies that recognise the potential of iwi structures for effective health promotion and health service delivery.

To date there has been a tension between responding to the tangata whenua rights and needs of Māori in relation to a total population approach. The focus, extent and boundaries of the Crown’s role in supporting the information and statistical needs of Māori should be determined by Māori needs and opinions.

Māori individuals and groups making submissions may wish to reflect on the following topics before answering the questions posed in the 'Guide to Stakeholders'. (The Guide is the list of questions that is to form the basis for the submissions. It is being sent to those wishing to make submissions).

- the relationship between Māori and the Crown in terms of official statistics;
- the role of the Crown in collecting, analysing and disseminating iwi or other Māori collective information (including the extent of this role);
- the responsibility of the Crown in recognising that Māori statistical needs are as valid as those of the total New Zealand population (including how this responsibility ought to be met).

Comments on other relevant issues are welcome.

Māori in official statistics

Government definitions of Māori have changed from those based around quantum of blood to that based in ethnic affiliation, a definition that was thought to better align with Māori social reality. This alignment with social reality also emphasised the need for self-identification, that is, for people to define their own ethnicity rather than have it prescribed by statute or another person. Self-identification underpins ethnic classification. It became the statutory procedure for the classification of ethnicity in 1975 for electoral purposes and for statistical purposes in the 1986 census.

However, a tension still exists between the statutory needs to determine the Māori population based on ancestry (eg to use when defining electoral boundaries) and the need to determine characteristics of the Māori ethnic group for the purposes of social statistics, policy and planning. Two separate questions are now used: both an ancestry question (to identify the populations in order to satisfy the legal and constitutional needs) as well as a question on ethnic group membership (to identify populations for use in statistical analysis).

Data quality

Data quality still poses a significant challenge for official statistics with regard to ethnicity. Issues of validity, continuity through time, consistency across data sets and data completeness still need improvement.

Validity– The dynamic aspects of ethnicity are illustrated by how the answers to an ethnicity question may change in different situations. Response may be influenced by the wording of the ethnicity question, the respondent's interpretation and engagement with the question, the purpose to which the information will be put and who is asking the question.

Continuity through time – Surveys taken at regular intervals can provide some information on time trends, if the questions are the same over time. This allows the impact of government policies on Māori, for example,

to be more reliably evaluated. Changes ought to be incorporated in a way that minimises disruption to historical continuity.

Consistency across data sets – Because different data sets are used in combination with each other (eg hospital admissions and census), it is important that ethnicity is asked consistently across these data sets. Currently there is poor consistency across data sets both because of missing data (ethnicity is not asked of all persons) and because alternative ethnicity questions are used (other than the census ethnicity question). While this information may not affect the quality of data for the total population, it does affect Māori information, making planning and evaluation of policies difficult.

Data completeness – Migration data is an important example of missing or incomplete data. Since the removal of the ethnicity questions on New Zealand arrival and departure cards in the mid-1980s, there has been no accurate information on the number of Māori leaving and/or returning to New Zealand. This information is needed for Statistics New Zealand to produce reliable estimates of Māori populations between the five-yearly censuses. The absence of this information also hampers Māori ability to factor Māori migration trends into the appropriate planning cycles.

Monitoring Māori outcomes

Measuring ethnicity provides the ability to monitor Māori outcomes. Reducing disparities between Māori and non-Māori citizens has been the focus of government attention in recent years. A question exists as to which Māori population should be used as the reference population for comparison.

Three Māori populations are produced from current census information: the Māori descent or ancestry group; the Māori ethnic group comprising those who indicated Māori as at least one of their ethnic affiliations; and the sole-Māori group that indicated Māori as their only ethnic affiliation. While sole-Māori is a sub-set of the Māori ethnic group, there is some evidence that its members have more risks associated with socio-economic deprivation and vulnerability in a colour-conscious society. However, if high quality ethnicity data is collected, disparities could be examined for all three of these Māori population groupings, to better inform decisions.

Māori individuals and groups making submissions may wish to reflect on the following topics before answering the questions posed in the 'Guide to Stakeholders'. (The Guide is the list of questions that is to form the basis for the submissions. It is being sent to those wishing to make submissions).

- how Māori should be defined in official statistics;
- whether those claiming Māori ethnicity should be required to have Māori ancestry;
- how the quality of ethnic statistics can be improved;
- the relative importance of historical continuity of the ethnicity question compared with adapting the question to suit contemporary understandings of ethnicity;
- whether the Crown should monitor Māori migration, and if so, how and where;

- whether there are other domains where ethnicity data ought to be collected;
- which Māori population group(s) is/are best suited to monitor Māori outcomes.

Comments on other relevant issues are welcome.

Different explanations for statistics

This section focuses on how statistics and their analysis are not neutral, but on the contrary, are value-laden and used for different agendas and points of view. The following statistic seems innocent enough: ‘Māori students are over two and a half times more likely than non-Māori students to leave school with no qualifications (39 percent compared with 14.6 percent)’. However, most people will have a question or an assumption about ‘why’. A superficial assumption is that the Māori student has failed. But there are a number of different ways to explain this statistic, and these need to be scrutinised. It could be equally presented as ‘the New Zealand education system is two and a half times more likely to fail Māori students than non-Māori students’, or again as, ‘New Zealand society, through the education system, privileges Pākehā by the time they leave school’.

Biological explanations for the differences between Māori and Pākehā in health and social wellbeing were common until the 1950s. Researchers (who were predominantly non-Māori) then became interested in cultural and socio-economic explanations. However, much of this research framed Māori as ‘deficient’ compared with Pākehā, and generated expectations that Māori would adapt to Pākehā norms. Pākehā culture remained unexamined and unequal power relations were not acknowledged.

Māori became ‘sick and tired of being blamed for their education and social shortcomings, their limitations highlighted and their obvious strengths of being privileged New Zealanders in being bilingual and bicultural ignored’ – Koro Dewes. Interest grew in measuring the ongoing impact of colonisation on cultural resources such as te reo, marae and hapū, which were recognised as being beneficial, rather than as barriers to wellbeing.

Colonisation and racism are prominent in Māori explanations for disparities but have received scant attention for official monitoring. In a society that protects against racism by law, there may be a high level of denial that ethnicity is important or indeed that racism exists. This may put Māori rights at risk.

Māori individuals and groups making submissions may wish to reflect on the following topic before answering the questions posed in the ‘Guide to Stakeholders’. (The Guide is the list of questions that is to form the basis for the submissions. It is being sent to those wishing to make submissions).

- what is the role of the Crown in ensuring that, through its official statistics, Māori are not minoritised or further marginalised?

Comments on other relevant issues are welcome.