

Response to the Future Census
Independent Evaluation Panel report:
Evaluation of New Zealand's future
census options for 2028 and beyond





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Purpose of this response

The report prepared by the Future Census Independent Evaluation Panel (the Panel) was part of the formal advice considered by the Government Statistician in making the in-principle decision about modernising New Zealand's census, and how the next census will run (also referred to as the manner of taking).

The Panel provided 83 recommendations for Stats NZ in its report, all of which were considered in the decision-making process. This response identifies the Panel's recommendations accepted by Stats NZ for actioning, and the recommendations that we commit to considering during the design phases for the next census. A small number of recommendations are no longer applicable or have been deemed out of scope and, in these instances, additional commentary is provided.

Introduction and acknowledgement

The Future Census Independent Evaluation Panel consisted of 10 members, representing a diverse range of data user perspectives and experiences with representation from academia, commerce and technology, central government, disabled communities, international census expertise, rainbow communities, Pacific communities, and iwi Māori. [Future Census Independent Evaluation Panel](#) provides more information.

The Panel's efforts and diligence was exemplary. The group worked tirelessly to review the proposed options for modernising the census and provide advice to Stats NZ. Stats NZ recognise and thank all members of the Panel for their individual and collective expertise and time.

We acknowledge Dr Jonathan Godfrey ONZM (National President – Blind Citizens NZ and Senior Lecturer in Statistics – Massey University) for his contribution as Panel Chair.

The Panel's informed report was received by the Government Statistician on 9 August 2024. It was shared with our Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and the team working on modernising the census. The valuable insights contained in the report have informed Stats NZ's work to date and will continue to do so.

As the report was a key information source for the Government Statistician in making the in-principle decision, it was not previously released. We acknowledge the timeframe between the Government Statistician's in-principle decision and Cabinet's consideration was lengthy and have sought to release the report alongside the public announcement, following Cabinet endorsement.

What the Panel recommended

The Panel was tasked with evaluating five potential future options for the census. Rather than recommending a single option, the Panel recommended taking a staged approach to modernising the census, with a final large-scale national census survey in 2028 (option 1), moving to an approach using a continuous sample survey in 2033 (option 4), and ultimately transitioning to a model where census data collection would be integrated into other household surveys (option 5). You can read more about the options the Panel considered in its report [Evaluation of New Zealand's future census options for 2028 and beyond](#).

The Panel based its evaluation on an assessment of each option against nine of 10 pre-defined criteria. A final criterion (cost) was unable to be included in time for the Panel's assessment, and this limitation was reflected in the Panel's updated [Terms of Reference](#). Following Stats NZ's analysis and review of cost information, the approach recommended by the Panel was found to exceed the available funding. This meant the Panel's preferred option for 2028 Census could not be implemented as originally proposed.

At this time, Stats NZ developed two cost-refined options, based on the Panel's recommended approach. The Panel was reconvened and invited to provide further insights to the Government Statistician based on the two revised options. The Panel considered that the recommendations in its report were robust and remained appropriate. Subsequently, the Government Statistician took an in-principle decision on the manner of taking the next census.

While the Government Statistician's in-principle decision does not adopt the Panel's recommended approach, Stats NZ has accepted 34 recommendations made by the Panel. In addition, Stats NZ will continue to consider 35 of the recommendations as our work progresses to modernise the census. More clarity on the design and costs of the next census will help to determine how best to meet wider information needs in the future. These recommendations will inform our work and we plan to share updates on their status. Of the remaining 11 recommendations, six are deemed out of scope and five recommendations are no longer applicable as the circumstances of the final decision-making process superseded them.

The tables in the following section identify how each recommendation has been considered by Stats NZ. Supporting commentary is provided beneath some recommendations to provide additional information or background.

Table of recommendations

These tables identify all the recommendations Stats NZ received from the Panel. Recommendations are grouped into categories to demonstrate how they informed the Government Statistician's in-principle decision or will be considered as Stats NZ embarks on the detailed design phases to develop the approach for the next census.

Supporting commentary is provided in italics beneath some of the recommendations to provide additional information or background.

Actioned and completed

Three of the Panel's recommendations have already been actioned and completed.

Number	Recommendation
3	That this report be proactively released into the public domain by the Government Statistician in a timely manner.
18	That the Government Statistician reconvene this panel if any substantial alterations to the proposed options are incorporated into the Government Statistician's recommendation to Cabinet for the manner of taking Census 2028.
30	That Stats NZ appoints a single, accountable Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) as the lead manager of the project. This SRO will be accountable to both the Board and the ELT table and should be the primary representative of the census outside of Stats NZ. Within the team led by SRO there should be considerable programme management expertise.

Accepted

Stats NZ has accepted a further 34 of the Panel's recommendations, including some that have already been started but not completed, or require ongoing monitoring.

Number	Recommendation
7	That Stats NZ improve engagement with iwi Māori to ensure meaningful partnerships for chosen options and pathways.

8	<p>That Stats NZ must continue work to implement the Māori Data Governance Model and develop a clear plan to ensuring that the technological and methodological solutions to delivering future censuses are in alignment with the principles of Māori Data Sovereignty and Māori Data Governance. The guidance in this includes considering and working to answer the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the proposal allow for the Māori exercise of rangatiratanga while recognising the right of the Crown to govern? 2. Have Māori had a role in design/implementation? 3. Does the proposal: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. enhance Māori wellbeing? b. build Māori capability or capacity? 4. Is there any aspect of this issue that Māori consider to be a taonga? 5. Does the proposal aim to achieve equitable outcomes? 6. How does the proposal differ from previous efforts to address the issue? 7. How does the proposal demonstrate that policymakers have looked at the proposal from the perspective of legal values such as natural justice, due process, fairness and equity? 8. How does the proposal demonstrate that policymakers have looked at the issue from the perspective of tikanga values?
10	<p>That Stats NZ effectively utilise all available levers to uplift the pace of the system changes needed to support the supply of quality and timely admin data from other government agencies. In order for an admin-first attribute survey, the panel recommends that the first iteration of this work is completed by 30 June 2027 to support Census 2033 (field collection from 2029). This work must have ongoing evaluation and development to improve quality for future Census.</p>
12	<p>That Stats NZ continue to improve the Admin Population Census so that it improves in both quality and coverage for all sub-populations. For this to be realised, a concerted effort across government agencies, not just Stats NZ, must occur.</p>
13	<p>That Stats NZ communicate to agencies what the system priorities are to lift the admin data first census system through any available funding via the Data Investment Plan.</p>
14	<p>That Government Agencies must show how they will actively commit to an all of Government admin data first strategy by 30 June 2025 as set out in the Data Investment Plan.</p>
16	<p>That Stats NZ have a clear plan to develop both government and public trust in the acquisition of admin data - including through both privacy, ethics, and security mechanisms - that are required to produce high-quality admin data.</p>

17	That Stats NZ prioritise the full and appropriate costing of activities for Census 2028. In addition, that the costs that are not solely related to Census 2028 activities must be apportioned carefully.
19	That Stats NZ promote the potential benefits of the selected Future Census options (both 2028 and 2033).
20	That Stats NZ continue to use transparent processes based on existing and new ethical frameworks that improve trust and confidence.
26	That Stats NZ must continue to develop approaches that ensure reliable and granular geographic information is available for <i>all</i> populations and particularly priority population groups.
27	That Stats NZ work with priority communities to better understand intersectionality issues, and to ensure reliable and granular data is collected which then allows for intersectionality to be represented in population statistics.
29	That the Government Statistician establish governance arrangements before the end of 2024 which should focus on preparations for both 2028 and 2033. Once established, these arrangements should remain ongoing as the Census Programme moves through its phases.
32	That Stats NZ make significant investment to ensure the features of the IDI spine are retained and improved as Stats NZ increases its reliance on an admin data first approach.
36	That Stats NZ evaluate the suite of surveys for how well they meet the needs and interests of sectors of NZ society that go beyond the key priority communities often given exclusive mention in plans.
40	<p>That Stats NZ ensures critical improvements in key admin data by 2028 to allow movement beyond Option 1. Note that this will require incentives and enforcement along with cross-government cooperation and is likely to require system funding. There needs to be concerted effort to improve the following critical existing admin data sets, as these targeted and prioritised activities deliver the most value and improvements to data quality for iwi Māori and priority communities. This will better describe the diversity of Aotearoa New Zealand, and also supports agencies to deliver their own services better. The explicit data attributes that need attention are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Level 4 ethnicity collection and provision: from Ministry of Health/Te Whatu Ora, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development and Immigration NZ* 2. Iwi affiliation collection: Department of Internal Affairs* 3. Māori descent collection: Ministry of Education* 4. Gender collection: everywhere - enforce the mandated standard and provide education for agencies (to ensure the standard is used appropriately, accurately and with consideration of privacy and safety)

	<p>5. Accurate and up to date address collection everywhere, including identification of temporary dwellings</p> <p>*The agencies specified in this recommendation are those currently considered by Stats NZ to be able to provide the best coverage across New Zealand and are the most appropriate to collect that dataset (in terms of the context people are engaging with each agency).</p> <p><i>Comment: Our understanding of how agencies are placed to provide coverage of various data attributes continues to develop. While the agencies specified above represented our best view at the time the Independent Evaluation Panel made its recommendations, work is ongoing and as such, this should be considered a preliminary view that is subject to change.</i></p>
41	<p>That Stats NZ pursue and affirm active partnerships (ongoing for all options) with the following communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iwi Māori; • Pacific; • Asian; • Rainbow; • Disability; and • People and organisations who work with/for transient populations.
44	<p>That Stats NZ take a greater role in the development of the Patient Profile/National Health Index (PPNHI) initiative (currently led by Te Whatu Ora) which links disability status to the NHI as this is the most promising opportunity for a robust and meaningful approach which honours the needs of disabled people to receive the right services AND leads to improved assessment of disability status for the purposes of disaggregated data.</p> <p><i>Comment: The Patient Profile and National Health Index Project is a Te Whatu Ora-led project to identify all disabled people and their access needs, to monitor outcomes and enhance service responsiveness and accessibility. This recommendation is accepted so long as it continues to be a funded cross-government project, currently through Te Whatu Ora Health NZ.</i></p>
48	<p>That Stats NZ work with admin data providers to ensure that people are aware their data is being provided to Stats NZ. It is noted that there is no ability to opt in or out of the sharing.</p>

49	That Stats NZ work to address concerns about intersectionality for priority populations. Specifically, this must ensure that rainbow communities, iwi-Māori, Pacific, Asian, disability, and transient populations are properly represented.
52	That Stats NZ and other government agencies work to improve the quality of admin data for priority populations so that it is at least the same quality as for the total population.
56	That Stats NZ work with The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), representatives of disabled people, and other necessary agencies to improve measurement of wellbeing of disabled children, and children living in households with disabled adults. <i>Comment: This requires cross-agency cooperation, and responsibility has shifted from DPMC to the Ministry of Social Development.</i>
57	That Stats NZ consider incorporating a Te Ao Māori view of disability into future iterations of the Te Kupenga Survey.
58	That the inclusion of the Washington Group Short Set on Functioning (WGSS) must be protected as a matter of priority in all current and future Stats NZ household surveys.
60	That in order for NZ to meet its obligations under Article 33 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), Stats NZ must work with the independent Monitoring Mechanism to better understand the data requirements of NZ's monitoring of its implementation of the UNCRPD.
62	That in order to meet its obligations under Article 4(3) of the UNCRPD, Stats NZ commits to an ongoing relationship with disabled people's organisations and the involvement by disabled people and their representatives in all matters pertaining to data about or collected from disabled people.
66	That Stats NZ affirm and build on their unique leadership role in promoting and advocating for the value and importance of rainbow data across agencies and continue to grow cross-government rainbow data expertise and infrastructure in partnership with rainbow communities and data experts.

67	That the Government Chief Data Steward ensures that Level 4 ethnicity data is collected through key admin data sources.
68	That Stats NZ affirms its commitment and resource the partnership approach with Pacific stakeholders including Pacific communities for Pacific-led data collection aligned to Pacific people's priorities and frameworks including the Pacific Data Strategy.
69	That Stats NZ ensure that a Pacific perspective is represented within governance frameworks for Future Census work.
76	That Stats NZ ensure, to the greatest extent possible, the technology capabilities it implements to enable future census activities are designed to support its wider statistical data collection and management requirements (including the needs of the wider government data system where appropriate) so as to maximise the Return on Investment (RoI) on taxpayers' investment in these systems. Given the added complexity of the Census, these corporate tools should first consider the requirements of the Census before building the features needed for the non-Census programmes of Stats NZ.
80	That Stats NZ invests in a strong data ethics framework to guide its future data collection and analysis activities.
81	<p>That Stats NZ ensure it fully understands the Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) and Operational Expenditure (OPEX) implications of moving to cloud-based enterprise ICT solutions. Relying on the current strong Stats NZ balance sheet and the potential of converting CAPEX to OPEX is particularly risky. Stats should ensure that Ministers and The Treasury understand the future OPEX requirements that Stats' ICT transformation will create and ensure that it is adequately baseline funded for ICT OPEX in future budget rounds.</p> <p><i>Comment: Ministers/Cabinet determine funding levels for Vote Statistics, while it is for Stats NZ to ensure that funding is used in the most value-enhancing manner.</i></p>
82	That Stats NZ devotes sufficient time and resources to the transition plan as there will be inevitable business change and change requirements in the transition from on-prem to the cloud.

To be considered during design phases

Thirty-five of the Panel's recommendations will be considered by Stats NZ in the detailed design phases for the next census. They include the following.

Number	Recommendation
9	That Stats NZ should invest in partnering with iwi to support iwi to self-collect iwi affiliation data.
11	That Stats NZ fully incorporate the requirement of census to count individuals and dwellings into the Data Investment Plan. This needs to include a prioritised list of admin data standards needed to fulfil the requirements of the future census.
25	That Stats NZ advances its admin data first framework in a way that implements zero trust architecture and modern data security, privacy, and ethical practices.
28	That the Government Statistician establish a governance structure similar to Census 2023 for Census 2028 and beyond. These governance arrangements should have a mix of independent and internal expertise (including the Government Statistician and key members of the Executive Leadership Team) and chaired by one of the independent members. The independent membership should include expertise in the governance of large, complex programmes, international expertise, iwi-Māori, as well as any other external representatives required.
31	That Stats NZ establish a review process with the objective of supporting improvement in trust and confidence, including but not limited to the social acceptability of large-scale admin data use. This external review should regularly review the policies, practices, processes and systems adopted by Stats NZ for safeguarding data. This independent, external review should be reported to the Programme Board who should be required to consider all recommendations, from which an action plan should be developed to ensure all agreed-upon improvements noted in the review are implemented.
33	That Stats NZ ensure the IDI incorporates essential demographic identifiers including ethnicity and disability status for the entire population.
34	That all Stats NZ household surveys move to multi-modal data collections in order to complement the chosen census model and the admin data first approach.
35	That Stats NZ incorporate additional modules targeted for priority communities within the data collections of all household surveys, especially those communities not well served under the admin data first strategy.
37	That Stats NZ consider increasing the frequency of Te Kupenga to be held no less frequently than once in each four years moving forwards.
38	That Stats NZ consider increasing the sample size of Te Kupenga.

42	That Stats NZ prioritise coordination across agencies and non-governmental organisations to support quality information in the dwelling register.
43	That Stats NZ work with rainbow communities to determine an appropriate data framework for indicators and explore whether there are any appropriate potential admin data sources of rainbow demographic variables.
45	That Stats NZ investigate sources of high-quality family data in admin data sources (family defined by individuals); (additionally will support improvements to address information)
46	That the Government Chief Data Steward ensures Government agencies use an ethnicity standard that does not create a prioritised ethnicity indicator but retains the integrity of ethnicity as would be selected by individuals using the agency's services. These concerns may be addressed in the revision of the ethnicity standard, but the standard must become mandatory.
47	That Stats NZ actively create opportunities and resource pathways for communities to run their own surveys, e.g. A Pacific census of all Pacific people, which would provide opportunities for the communities to attempt a full enumeration of their populations.
50	That Stats NZ develop and report against a 'data equity' plan to ensure that priority populations are not disproportionately negatively impacted by the selected Future Census options.
51	That Stats NZ invest in ensuring that priority populations and numerically smaller groups have their information needs met and supported, while ensuring that Stats NZ retains the "brand" of collecting and producing high quality and trusted data. This needs to include providing investment, support and training in capacity building for priority data users.
53	That Stats NZ lead work into establishing how diverse aspects of disability will be used to create a more useful measure of disability status for the IDI.
54	That Stats NZ work with all Government agencies that intend to collect admin data that has a disability component to ensure that the results can add value to the process of a more complete disability status indicator based on admin data coming from multiple sources.
55	That the Government Chief Data Steward adopt an ethical framework overseeing the relevance for collecting disability status and that the Government Chief Data Steward and/or Chief Privacy Officer be given a mandatory/regulatory role in determining/approving the appropriateness of asking about disability status in a given admin context.

59	That Stats NZ undertake the Household Disability Survey (HDS) at a much greater frequency, whether this be a post-censal survey or as an added module for participants in other Stats NZ surveys such as a census attribute survey.
61	That Stats NZ work with the disability sector to develop an action plan for improving its services and processes in line with the objectives of Articles 9 and 31 of the UNCRPD.
63	<p>That Stats NZ resources a specific work programme to enable the agency to work with rainbow data experts and across other government agencies to continuously improve how rainbow data is conceptualised, collected and reported on in surveys and administrative sources. Stats NZ must ensure that this work includes expertise in transgender and intersex data, and Māori and Pacific conceptualisations of rainbow, takatāpui, MVPFAFF+ and related identities and experiences.</p> <p><i>Comment: Te Mana Ola: The Pacific Health Strategy MVPFAFF+ is a term coined by Phylesha Brown-Acton. It stands for the names of the broad gender spectrum from across the Pacific region: mahu (Tahiti and Hawaii), vakasalewa (Fiji), palopa (Papua New Guinea), fa'afafine (Samoa), akava'ine (Cook Islands) fakaleiti (leiti) (Tonga) and fakafifine (Niue).</i></p>
64	That Stats NZ further explore and continue to test moving the Census and other surveys towards asking directly about gender modality or transgender status, and away from the current 'two step' method. This would reduce the risk of inaccuracies for transgender and non-binary populations introduced by administrative sources of sex and gender data.
65	That Stats NZ explore options for collaborating with and resourcing community-led non-probabilistic surveys to improve insight into rainbow experiences, and consider how additional surveys could be developed, such as for the intersex population.
70	That Stats NZ develops an awareness campaign for Future Census includes a Pacific component for tailored approaches with Pacific communities.
71	That Stats NZ works with the Ministry for Pacific Peoples and Pacific stakeholders (including Pacific communities) to develop a Pacific wellbeing data framework.
72	That Stats NZ turn intention into firm commitment for a Pacific well-being survey run prior to 2030 and that this is formally incorporated into the survey schedule for each of the Future Census options.
73	That Stats NZ updates its Pacific Data Strategy to reflect the selected Future Census approach.
74	That Stats NZ work with broader community sectors to improve the integration of dwelling-related information. This needs to facilitate full coverage of dwellings in Aotearoa, including temporary and non-private dwellings, such as camping grounds and boarding houses.

75	That Stats NZ ensure that it appropriately adheres to the cloud first policy when designing and implementing technology capabilities required to enable future approaches to the census. Technology transformation must also consider Māori Data Sovereignty principles.
77	That Stats NZ ensures that exemplary governance arrangements are established for the design and implementation of its ICT strategy and work programme, which must include significant external expertise.
78	That Stats NZ fully complies with all relevant aspects of the Protective Security Requirements and NZ Information Security Manual, adopts an "assume breach" security posture, and explicitly implements a zero-trust approach to information security.
79	That Stats NZ commits to implementing state-of-the-art data privacy and data governance practices and capabilities that are rigorously implemented, and are subject to regular third-party audit.
83	That Stats NZ continue to improve and support the development and scaling up of Mana Motuhake data infrastructure across all aspects of the data life cycle.

No longer applicable

Five of the Panel's recommendations are no longer applicable to how we will modernise the next census. This is because further work to understand how we would deliver the five options as initially proposed to the Panel showed that its recommended approach could not be implemented within available funding. Revised options were subsequently discussed with the Panel, as detailed in the Government Statistician's decision paper. Rather than appending a copy of the Panel's report to the Cabinet Paper as suggested, we are releasing it alongside all key decision-making material, so that development of the options is transparent and fully understood.

While the following five recommendations may not align with the approach to modernising the census as they are currently worded, we have worked to adopt the essence of the recommendations where possible. In respect of Recommendation 6, while this recommendation has been considered no longer applicable due to the revised set of options available for the next census, Stats NZ has worked to meet its obligations to te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi and these are set out in the Regulatory Impact Statement accompanying the Cabinet paper. We are committed to ensuring an appropriate approach is applied as the work to modernise the census progresses. We also note Appendix 2 of the Government Statistician's decision paper, and the report *Modernising our approach to the 2028 Census: Summary of iwi and Māori engagement* provides further information on our engagement approach with iwi and Māori partners and groups.

Number	Recommendation
1	That the Government Statistician propose Option 1 for Census 2028.
2	That Stats NZ commit to Option 4 for Census 2033 (from 2029) and move to Option 5 for censuses in subsequent cycles.
4	That this report be an appendix to the Cabinet Paper relating to the Future of Census.
5	That critical agencies upon which Stats NZ depends upon for admin data receive a copy of this report. This will allow their response to the Cabinet Paper to be informed by the efforts of the panel as soon as is reasonably possible, providing additional time to consider the full implications of the recommendations herein, which may or may not appear in the main cabinet paper.
6	That Stats NZ commission independent Te Tiriti analysis of each of the Future Census options. This should have been done before this point. Stats NZ should continue to consult with Data Iwi Leaders Group, using the analysis to align future census design with Te Tiriti. The Te Tiriti analysis reports must be proactively released including to iwi partners. The majority view of the panel is that Stats NZ commission the Te Tiriti analysis to feed into the design decisions going forward. It is critical to note that some Panel Members assert that a decision should not be made by the Government Statistician about Census options until Te Tiriti analysis has occurred.

Out of scope

Six recommendations were deemed to be out of scope of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision, are outside Stats NZ's sphere of influence, or have been superseded by the in-principle decision that was made.

Five of these recommendations relate to the role of the Government Chief Data Steward and their accountability to Cabinet. In response to these recommendations, we acknowledge that the Public Service Commissioner assigns all System Leaders under the Public Service Act 2020. Currently, the Government Chief Data Steward role is assigned to whomever holds the Chief Executive role at Stats NZ. System Leaders are responsible to their appropriate Minister for achieving agreed outcomes. All System Leads have work programmes that have been endorsed by the Government.

A further comment on Te Kupenga (per Recommendation 39) is included below.

Number	Recommendation
15	That the Government Chief Data Steward report annually to Cabinet on all of the government progress to achieve the admin data first strategy and, as needed, advise on what actions are required to lift progress.
21	That serious consideration be given to separating the role of Government Chief Data Steward from that of Government Statistician or Chief Executive so that there is little risk that actions taken by the Government Chief Data Steward can be seen to favour the business direction/imperatives of Stats NZ.
22	That the Government Chief Data Steward formulate a cross-Government programme of change as a matter of urgency and that this be used as the road map for the newly repositioned Government Chief Data Steward.
23	That the Government Chief Data Steward be responsible to a Cabinet Minister whose other responsibilities pose minimal conflicts of interest.
24	That the Government Chief Data Steward be responsible for the progress reports which will be monitored by Cabinet, perhaps by way of delegated authority to an external board or a governance structure to be determined and responsible to Cabinet.
39	<p>That if the Government Statistician chooses either Options 1 or 2, that there is a firm commitment made to running Te Kupenga following Census 2028, or if either of Options 3 or 4 are chosen, that the next Te Kupenga be conducted in 2027.</p> <p><i>Comment: Te Kupenga is designed as a post-censal survey, as Census data is used to select respondents for the survey. It is funded to be a 10-yearly survey, with the next Te Kupenga data collection scheduled for 2028. The design of the next Te Kupenga will be informed by the decisions around the manner of taking the next census.</i></p> <p><i>(Please note the Te Kupenga recommendations outlined in numbers 37 and 38 will be actively considered during the design process and recommendation 57 has been accepted).</i></p>