

In Confidence

Office of the Minister of Statistics

Cabinet Economic Policy Committee

Modernising and transforming the 2028 Census: Public consultation document

Proposal

- 1 This paper attaches a public consultation document on modernising the approach to 2028 Census, as requested by Cabinet on 25 March 2024.

Relation to government priorities

- 2 This work supports the Government's coalition agreements to deliver better public services. Modernising and transforming the census will make it more sustainable, efficient, and responsive. It will also reduce respondent burden and provide better value for New Zealanders.
- 3 The data and statistics generated from the census inform a wide range of government functions, policies, and services. This includes health system funding, infrastructure planning, determining electoral boundaries and the number of electorates, local government and community planning, economic reporting, and supporting the evidence base for social investment.

Last month, Cabinet endorsed the Government Statistician's plans to consult on a proposed new approach to the 2028 Census

- 4 On 19 March 2024, I took a Cabinet paper about the 2028 Census to the Cabinet Expenditure and Regulatory Review Committee (EXP).¹ The purpose of this paper was to outline the Government Statistician's plans to publicly consult on a proposed approach to modernise the next census.
- 5 At this meeting, Cabinet EXP Committee members:
 - 5.1 noted the current approach to census is unsustainable and the future approach to census needs to be modernised and transformed.
 - 5.2 noted that I have directed Stats NZ to develop options for the 2028 Census and beyond. I consider that using an **administrative data-first approach** is the future. This means reusing existing data where possible and supporting this with surveying and other tailored options where administrative data is unavailable or of insufficient quality.
 - 5.3 noted Stats NZ's three-stage engagement and consultation plan to inform decisions on the approach to 2028 Census. This includes two

¹ *Modernising and Transforming the 2028 Census: Public Consultation on an Administrative Data-First Approach for Census*

rounds of public consultation, with the first commencing in the coming months.

- 5.4 invited me to submit the public consultation document to Cabinet for approval before the first round of public consultation begins [EXP-24-MIN-0011 refers].

- 6 This was endorsed by Cabinet on 25 March 2024 [CAB-24-MIN-0101 refers].

I now present the public consultation document for your information

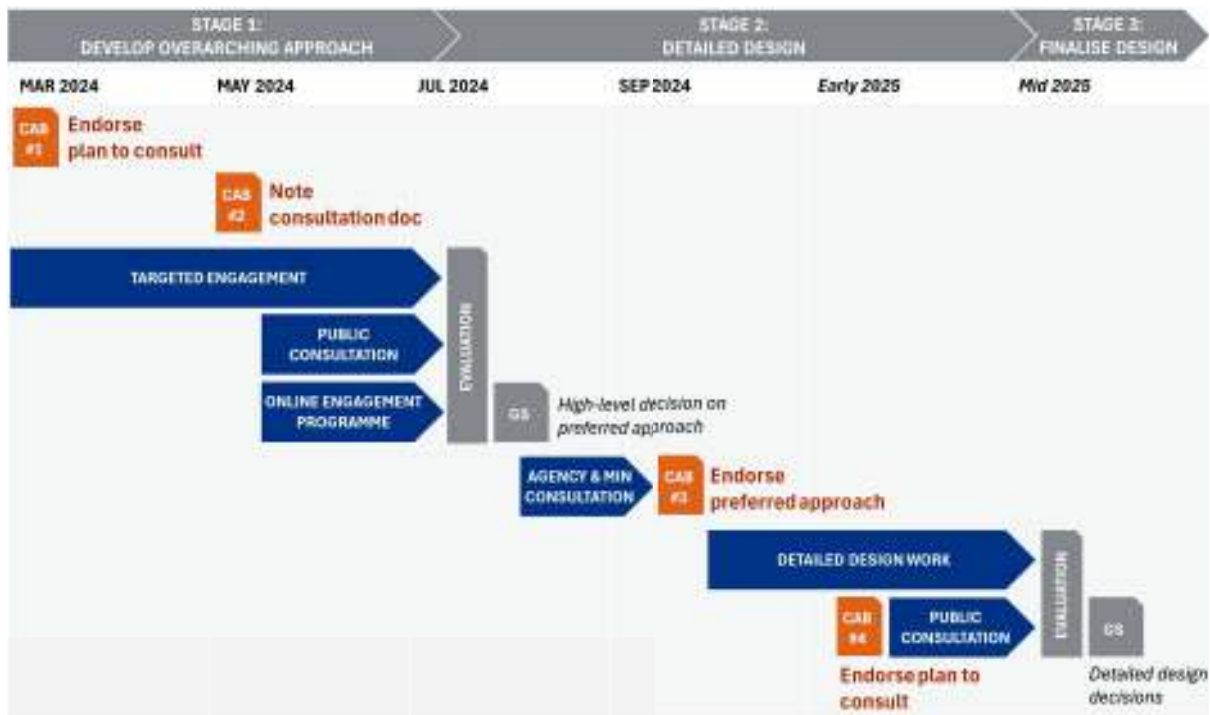
- 7 Moving away from a **full enumeration model** (where everyone is counted using surveying) to an **administrative data-first approach** (supplemented by surveying and other tailored options) would be an evolution from how census has historically been conducted. This shift is increasingly being considered in other jurisdictions, with countries such as the United Kingdom and Canada moving towards using more administrative data in their censuses. Stats NZ is considering adapting design elements that have been explored and tested by other countries. See **Appendix 1** for more detail on some international approaches.
- 8 The primary purpose of the first round of public consultation is to communicate the case for change and seek feedback on the proposed shift. This is reflected in the content of the attached public consultation document (**Appendix 2**).
- 9 Changes to the census model are an operational statutory function delegated to the Government Statistician. Section 36 of the Data and Statistics Act 2022 specifies that, before determining the manner of taking the census, the Government Statistician is required to consult in the manner the Statistician considers appropriate with a range of stakeholders and the public.
- 10 As Cabinet noted in March 2024, Stats NZ's engagement and consultation approach includes:
- 10.1 targeted engagement with key stakeholders and partners (e.g. agencies, iwi and Māori, Pacific peoples, key communities, and academics) on using an administrative data-first approach, specific data needs, and technical issues.
 - 10.2 public consultation on the new approach, supported by the attached discussion document. This will provide an opportunity for people to signal their level of support for and provide feedback on shifting to an administrative data-first approach to 2028 Census.
 - 10.3 a light-touch online public engagement programme. Stats NZ will use a series of social media posts with simple yes/no statements to elicit responses and reactions. This will help to identify areas of support and where Stats NZ need to build trust.
- 11 While public consultation is an operational statutory function of the Government Statistician, there may be a high degree of public interest in the

proposed shifts. For this reason, after consulting with the Prime Minister's Office and Cabinet Office, I am now presenting the public consultation document for your information.

Sequencing of future Cabinet decisions

- 12 Public consultation is expected to commence on 8 May 2024 for a period of six weeks. Following public consultation, the Government Statistician will decide on a preferred approach to the 2028 Census. The preferred approach will indicate the high-level model to be used for the 2028 Census. This decision will be informed by the feedback from consultation and engagement, design work, and analysis by an independent evaluation panel (consisting of external members).
- 13 Once the Government Statistician decides on a preferred approach, I will return to Cabinet to indicate this preference and to seek Cabinet's endorsement of this approach. I will provide further information to Cabinet, in increasing levels of detail, over the next 12-18 months as work progresses.
 - 13.1 In late 2024, I will return to Cabinet to seek endorsement of the Government Statistician's preferred approach to 2028 Census. At this time, I will provide an overview of the feedback from the engagement and consultation process to date. I will set also out the rationale for this decision, including the benefits, potential limitations, and trade-offs of the preferred approach, as well as the mitigations. This will help address the questions asked at Cabinet EXP Committee in March 2024 about the impact of an administrative data-first approach. It will also provide assurance about how the model will support the role census plays in setting electoral boundaries and the number of electorates, and the impacts for data on priority population groups (e.g. diverse deaf and disabled communities and migrants).
 - 13.2 Once an approach is endorsed, Stats NZ will focus on the detailed design of the new model. This will be undertaken in collaboration with key partners and stakeholders to ensure the new model delivers value, meets agreed information needs, and is safe and trusted.
 - 13.3 I also intend to return to Cabinet in early- to mid-2025 to seek endorsement of a second round of public consultation on the detailed design of the approach to 2028 Census. It will also focus on the specific content that could be covered in the 2028 Census to ensure information needs are met, and options about how Stats NZ could collect particular types of data. This will include providing Cabinet with a draft discussion document ahead of the second round of public consultation. Once a model has been agreed, I will work with the Government Statistician to put in place independent governance and assurance mechanisms to oversee implementation.

- 14 Key decision points and Cabinet engagement are set out in the diagram below.



Cost-of-living implications

- 15 The proposals in this paper will not have implications for the cost of living.

Financial Implications

- 16 There are no financial implications directly related to the recommendations in this paper.

Stats NZ will continue to work with the Treasury and other agencies, if required, regarding any future financial implications.

Legislative implications

- 17 Consulting publicly fulfils a legislative requirement under the Data and Statistics Act 2022.

Impact analysis

- 18 A Regulatory Impact Statement is not required for this paper. A Climate Implications of Policy Assessment is also not required.

Population implications

- 19 This public consultation document outlines how Stats NZ plans to engage and consult with key partners, stakeholders, and the public on modernising 2028 Census. It is important that census data and statistics represent all population

groups in New Zealand, and that they have an opportunity to provide feedback.

- 20 This includes engaging with population groups that Stats NZ recognises as being misrepresented, under-represented, or currently not present in administrative data sources, such as iwi and Māori, Pacific peoples, disabled people, and the Rainbow community. Stats NZ will continue to engage with representatives of these communities throughout the design process.

Human rights

- 21 The proposals in the paper are consistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, the Human Rights Act 1993, and the Privacy Act 2020. The engagement and consultation processes are also expected to canvas any future implications for individual rights and privacy regarding a modernised and transformed census approach.

Use of external resources

- 22 Engagement and consultation will be undertaken by Stats NZ staff. An external provider has been procured to support online public engagement.

Consultation

- 23 Departmental and Ministerial consultation were undertaken concurrently. The following agencies were consulted on this Cabinet paper (with the public consultation document attached for their information): the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, Department of Corrections, Crown Law Office, Ministry of Education, Electoral Commission, ACC, Te Arawhiti, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government Communications Security Bureau, Ministry of Health, Department of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Land Information New Zealand, National Cyber Security Centre, Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People, Oranga Tamariki, Ministry for Pacific Peoples, Te Puni Kōkiri, Ministry of Social Development, Social Wellbeing Agency, Public Service Commission, The Treasury, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Ministry for Women, Office of the Privacy Commissioner, the Ombudsman, Ministry for Ethnic Communities, Health New Zealand – Te Whatu Ora, Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency.²
- 24 Most agencies who provided feedback during consultation did not indicate any major concerns. However, a small number of population-focussed agencies noted some concerns about the potential impacts of an administrative data-first approach on priority population groups. Specifically, they expressed concerns that it might not provide high-quality information for some groups, and thus exacerbate existing inequities. Agencies also noted that there are potential financial impacts on those who would be accountable for collecting

² Departmental and Ministerial consultation was also undertaken on the previous Cabinet paper in March 2024 regarding Stats NZ's intentions to modernise and transform the 2028 Census. The feedback from this process continues to inform Stats NZ's work, including the development of the public consultation document.

population statistics, and these, and other financial impacts, have not been made clear.

- 25 We acknowledge the concerns raised, and seek to address them throughout the 2028 Census design process, including through further and continued engagement over the next 15-18 months with government agencies, priority population groups, and other key stakeholders to ensure that their concerns and data needs are reflected in the design. Stats NZ will continue to explore and test the quality and availability of administrative data sources throughout the census design process and will only use administrative data when it is of a sufficient quality to produce high quality data and statistics. Surveying will still be used to collect data where administrative data is not available or of insufficient quality.

Communications

- 26 When the public consultation document is ready to be published, Stats NZ will issue a press statement and invite stakeholders and the public to provide feedback as part of the engagement and public consultation processes.

Proactive release

- 27 I intend to proactively release this paper on Stats NZ's website within 30 business days of Cabinet decisions.

Recommendations

The Minister of Statistics recommends that the Committee:

- 1 note that on 25 March 2024, Cabinet:
 - 1.1 noted the plan to consult on modernising 2028 Census, and Stats NZ's three-stage engagement and consultation approach
 - 1.2 invited me to submit the public consultation document on modernising the approach to 2028 Census for approval [CAB-24-MIN-0101 refers]
- 2 note that changes to the census model are an operational statutory function delegated to the Government Statistician, and public consultation supports a requirement under section 36 of the Data and Statistics Act 2022 for the Government Statistician to consult on the manner for taking the census
- 3 note the Government Statistician's intention to release the attached document for public consultation (**Appendix 2**)
- 4 note that I intend to return to Cabinet in late 2024 with further detail on the potential impacts and benefits, and to seek endorsement to the Government Statistician's preferred approach for 2028 Census
- 5 note that, once an approach is endorsed, Stats NZ will focus on the detailed design of the new model, in collaboration with key partners and stakeholders
- 6 note that I intend to return to Cabinet in early- to mid-2025 to seek endorsement of a second round of public consultation on the detailed design of the approach to 2028 Census.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Andrew Bayly

Minister of Statistics

Appendix 1: International approaches

Census models

Census approaches used around the world can generally be categorised into the following categories:

- **The traditional model** – this model collects all census data by surveying every person in a country on a specified day. This survey provides the data for a full population count, full dwelling count, and attributes (i.e. details or descriptions) of the population and dwellings. This was the model New Zealand used before 2018 and the model that most countries have traditionally based their censuses on.
- **A combined model** – this model collects census data by using a combination of survey data and administrative data. Countries that use this model use different levels of survey and administrative data in their census collection depending on their data needs and the quality of their available administrative data. This is the model New Zealand used in the 2018 and 2023 censuses. Most census data was collected via the census survey, with administrative data used to include people missed by the census survey or to fill data gaps.
- **A register-based (administrative data-only) model** – this model uses data held by the government to collect all census data. This model is often used by countries that have a high-functioning population register system in place and is most notably used by Scandinavian countries. A register is a list or database that holds information about the public.

International trends

Model type

While the traditional model is still the most common census approach worldwide, there is an international trend of countries (particularly OECD countries) moving away from a traditional census approach and towards approaches that increasingly use administrative data.

For example, across the EU-27, the number of countries undertaking a traditional census model decreased from 17 in 2001 to six in 2021. At the same time, the number of EU-27 countries undertaking a register-based or combined model (like New Zealand's model) has increased from 10 in 2001 to 20 in 2021. Across the world, in 2020, about one-quarter of census models had shifted to non-traditional models.

Frequency

While the United Nations Statistics Division guidelines require a census of population and dwellings at a minimum of every 10 years, many countries are finding this does not meet the needs of their user communities. The European Union is implementing regulations from 2026 for all member states to produce population and housing

statistics quarterly, annually, and multi-annually, with a level of detail comparable or greater than current 10-yearly census statistics. Similarly, the Office for National Statistics in the United Kingdom has proposed in its future census consultation to produce most census statistics annually, with some variables at a 15–18-month interval. This reflects the rapidly changing composition of the population and housing stock, as well as the value of this data in planning and decision-making.

Like Australia and Canada, the Data and Statistics Act 2022 requires that a census is taken every five years in New Zealand. The five-yearly census also triggers the Representation Commission, the body responsible for reviewing electoral boundaries. Any changes to the frequency of the census would require legislative changes and Stats NZ would have to be confident that the data needs of customers and partners could still be met.

See table below for further details on specific countries and models used.

Model Type	Country	Census survey	Frequency of census survey	Supplementary survey used	Frequency of supplementary survey	Current admin data use in census	Planned future admin data use in census	Comments/details
Traditional	Australia	✓	5 years	×	-	×	✓	Considering using more administrative data in future censuses; possibly running a combined census model in 2031.
	United Kingdom	✓	10 years	×	-	×	✓	Public consultation in 2023 about plans to evolve to a system that would "primarily use administrative data such as tax or benefit data, complemented by survey data and a wider range of data sources replacing the current reliance on the census every ten years".
	United States	✓	10 years	✓	Annual	×	×	A full population survey is done every 10 years, supplemented by a continuous sample survey (every month, sent to 3 percent of households).
	Canada	✓	5 years	×	-	×	✓	Every five years the population completes a short 17 question census survey, but one-quarter of dwellings are required to complete a 'long form' version of 55 questions covering a wider range of topics.
Combined	Italy	✓	Annual	×	-	✓	-	Every year, a sample of approximately 1.4 million households across Italy are surveyed and administrative data is used to supplement this survey data.
	Switzerland	×	-	✓	Annual	✓	-	Data is primarily drawn from population registers, which is supplemented by sample surveys to collect data not held in the registers. Roughly 5 percent of the population is surveyed in writing or by telephone.
	Turkey	×	-	✓	10 years	✓	-	Data is collected every 10 years from population registers in combination with a large-scale household survey (approximately 2.4 million households) and a complete enumeration of institutional places.
	Belgium	×	-	✓	10 years	✓	-	Data is collected every 10 years and is based on administrative data sources and surveys. About 60 percent of statistics compiled are from administrative databases or other existing sources and the remaining 40 percent of statistics are compiled from surveys.
Register-based	Denmark	×	-	×	-	✓	-	Since 1970, censuses have been exclusively based on administrative registers, particularly data from the Civil Registration System.
	Sweden	×	-	×	-	✓	-	Population data in Sweden, including census data, is drawn from the 'population registration', which is the civil registration of vital population events administered by the Swedish Tax Agency.
	Finland	×	-	×	-	✓	-	The population census and the count of dwellings and real estate are carried out every 10 years and the data are drawn entirely from registers and administrative files.

Appendix 2: Public consultation document