

Report

Approach to future census and next steps

Date:	25 October 2024	Security Level:	In confidence
To:	Hon Andrew Bayly, Minister of Statistics	Report Number:	MM2826

Purpose

- Informs you of the Government Statistician’s in-principle decision on future census
- Attaches a briefing updating your colleagues of this decision
- Seeks your agreement to take this decision to Cabinet in March 2025 for endorsement.

Recommendations

- 1

Note that the Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision to deliver the next census using administrative data, combined with an annual sample survey and other tailored solutions

Noted
- 2

Note this will change the census date by two years (taking place in 2030, rather than 2028) which will require amendments to the Data and Statistics Act 2022

Noted
- 3

Agree to seek Cabinet’s endorsement to this approach in March 2025


Agree | Disagree
- 4

Agree to provide your Ministerial colleagues with the attached Stats NZ briefing to update them prior to Cabinet (**Appendix 2**)

Agree | Disagree
- 5

Note that if you wish to meet with other Ministers to discuss the approach, the Government Statistician can support you in these meetings.

Noted

	25 th October 2024
Rachael Milicich Acting Government Statistician and Acting Chief Executive, Stats NZ	Date
Hon Andrew Bayly Minister of Statistics	Date

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision

- 1 The Government Statistician has spoken to you over the last month about his preferred approach to modernise the manner of taking the next census, and has now made an in-principle decision on the matter.
- 2 The Government Statistician's preferred approach is to deliver the next census using administrative data combined with an annual sample survey (a 'Census Attribute Survey') and other tailored solutions (e.g. smaller, more targeted surveys). Administrative data and the Census Attribute Survey will meet the core purposes of census, with tailored solutions providing for different information needs.
- 3 This approach is a shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey of the whole population and will mean that census data will be collected and published differently. To implement this approach and provide government agencies with adequate time to prepare, the official census count will be released in 2030, rather than 2028. This requires an amendment to the Data and Statistics Act 2022.
- 4 Some key variables, such as population counts and structure (e.g. age and sex, location, and ethnicity) will be released annually from 2026 onwards using administrative data sources only. This will ensure agencies continue to have the information they need to set electoral boundaries for upcoming elections, undertake long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and inform population funding models. We will achieve this by publishing experimental releases in 2026 and 2027, with annual publication of official statistics beginning in 2028, working towards 2030 Census.
- 5 Other variables are currently not well represented in administrative data and will need to be supplemented by the Census Attribute Survey and targeted survey information. This means that data on some variables will only be available from 2030 onwards, as new methods for producing these measures will need to be developed. This will impact the production of products like the New Zealand Deprivation Index and the Severe Housing Deprivation Index.

Seeking Cabinet endorsement

- 6 Subject to your agreement, we intend to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision in March 2025. The Cabinet paper will include:
 - 6.1 the case for change
 - 6.2 policy proposals (including to seek legislative change, and to strengthen levers for improving administrative data across government)
 - 6.3 implementation planning for the chosen option
 - 6.4 development of the cost profile (for Stats NZ and across the data system)
 - 6.5 an impact analysis.
- 7 Following Cabinet endorsement, Stats NZ can begin the work in earnest to transition to the new approach internally and with government agencies.
- 8 The proposed pathway to Cabinet, and key milestones, are set out below.

Date	Milestone
7 Nov	Your office shares progress update briefing with key Ministers (and, if desired, schedules meetings to discuss the preferred approach)
7 Nov – 15 Nov	Targeted agency engagement focussed primarily on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implementing the preferred approach • understanding costings and impacts for agencies
9 - 11 Dec	Draft Cabinet paper to your office for feedback: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seeking approval for departmental consultation • outlining next steps for the Cabinet process
17 Dec	Begin departmental consultation
<i>House Rises: Christmas / New Year period</i>	
21 Jan	<i>Wellington anniversary</i>
28 Jan	Departmental consultation ends
3 – 5 Feb	Share updated Cabinet paper with your office and seek approval to begin Ministerial consultation
6 Feb	<i>Waitangi Day</i>
11 – 24 Feb	Ministerial consultation
28 Feb	Final version of Cabinet paper to your office
6 March (indicative)	Cabinet paper lodged to ECO Cabinet Committee
13 March (indicative)	ECO Committee
20 March (indicative)	Cabinet

Steps to build support and other next steps

- 9 The success of the Cabinet paper will require the support of your Ministerial colleagues and their government agencies. We recommend that you provide the update briefing (attached as **Appendix 2**) to your key Ministerial colleagues. You could also offer to meet your colleagues to further discuss the proposed approach. The Government Statistician can support you in these meetings if you wish. **Appendix 1** includes a recommended list of Ministers with an interest in the in-principle decision.
- 10 Stats NZ will work closely with key government agencies on this work and will continue our engagement and collaboration with them leading up to the March 2025 Cabinet paper and beyond. Early engagement on the preferred approach will mean we can identify any issues and work to resolve them ahead of Cabinet consideration.

Report number: MM2826

Authors: Carly Skerrett - Policy Advisor, Ushana Jayasuriya - Policy Advisor

Responsible manager: Tennille Maxey, Director of Policy

Appendix 1: List of key Ministers for a progress update

Stats NZ recommends you share the progress update with:

Ministers	Relevant portfolio(s)	Rationale
Rt Hon Christopher Luxon	Prime Minister	Interest in fiscally efficient improvements to the way government agencies collect and manage data, contributing to the evidence base required for wider government goals such as digital government and social investment.
Hon Nicola Willis	Finance Social Investment	
Hon Chris Bishop	Housing	Portfolios include agencies that have shown a significant interest in the decision and how it can meet the needs and interests of specific population groups.
Hon Dr Shane Reti	Health Pacific Peoples	
Hon Melissa Lee	Ethnic Communities	
Hon Erica Stanford	Education, Immigration	Portfolios include key data supply agencies that will have an interest in understanding new supply expectations and the potential cost, as well as seeking assurance that the new approach can meet their needs. Portfolios include agencies that represent interests of some population groups.
Hon Louise Upston	Disability Issues Social Development and Employment	
Hon Judith Collins KC	Digitising Government	Interest in improvements to the wider data system and infrastructure to build strong admin data across government.

Ministers you may choose to share a progress update with:

Ministers	Relevant portfolio(s)	Rationale
Rt Hon Winston Peters	Deputy Prime Minister	Portfolios have a moderate interest in the census. Engagement will also support cross-party awareness of the in-principle decision and canvas opposition in areas which might not have been considered yet.
Hon David Seymour	Regulation	
Hon Simeon Brown	Transport	
Hon Mark Mitchell	Police	
Hon Tama Potaka	Māori Development	
Hon Simon Watts	Revenue	
Hon Brooke van Velden	Internal Affairs	

Appendix 2: Progress update briefing for Ministers

Briefing

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the future of census

Executive summary

- 1 This paper provides context about the next census and updates you on the Government Statistician's in-principle decision to modernise its approach, before seeking Cabinet endorsement to this approach in March 2025.
- 2 Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years. The data from census delivered an estimated value of \$2.8 billion as of August 2021 and supports the setting of electoral boundaries and determining the number of electorates for upcoming elections, undertaking long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and informing population funding models.
- 3 The delivery of census data to support data needs requires a significant investment by government. The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years - a significant increase from the 2018 Census (\$126m) and the 2013 Census (\$104m). The current approach to the census is unsustainable and facing significant challenges.
- 4 The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision to modernise the approach for the next census. The preferred approach is to deliver the next census using administrative data combined with an annual sample survey (i.e. a Census Attribute Survey) and other tailored solutions (e.g. targeted surveys).
- 5 The preferred approach will:
 - a) increase the flexibility and responsiveness to meet data needs
 - b) improve data quality over time
 - c) reduce the direct burden on the public associated with filling out the census
 - d) increase efficiency by reusing data
 - e) reduce cost over time
 - f) increase the census' resilience (e.g. to natural disasters).
- 6 Appendix 1 provides an overview of the expected quality and availability of census data under the preferred approach. Under the preferred option, key data will be released annually from 2026 onwards, with the official census counts delivered in 2030. This ensures that agencies will have the information they need to set electoral boundaries and determine the number of electorates for upcoming elections, undertake long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and inform population funding models.
- 7 Under the preferred option, there will be a reduction in the accuracy of some data, particularly data on smaller population groups (e.g. Pacific people and disability communities). However, overall, there is a longer-term improvement to data quality, and most data will be collected and published more frequently, which improves the timeliness and relevance elements of data quality.
- 8 The preferred approach is a significant shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey of the whole population. The success of the approach will require support from across government and agencies will be called on to help by improving the quality of data and building a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.

- 9 The preferred option will require an amendment to the Data and Statistics Act 2022 to:
 - a) clarify the timing of data collection and publishing under the preferred approach
 - b) change the date of the next census to 2030, rather than in 2028, and
 - c) simplify the notification process for data collection and clarify the requirements of the Government Statistician under the new approach.
- 10 Under the preferred option, some key data will be delivered earlier than 2030. However, this is a significant change. Therefore, to give Stats NZ and other government agencies the time required to lift the quality of administrative data, implement an annual sample survey and adapt to the new delivery schedule, official census counts will be delivered in 2030.
- 11 Ahead of seeking Cabinet endorsement of the preferred approach to the next census in March 2025, Stats NZ will be reaching out to your agencies to support an understanding of the approach, prepare agencies for the change, and identify what needs to be done to achieve success.

Background

- 12 Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years counting every person and dwelling. The value derived from the data delivered from census was estimated at \$2.8 billion in August 2021 and it is a significant investment by government in the data system, with the 2023 Census costing approximately \$326 million over five years. For the next census, the funding appropriated is less than that for the 2023 Census programme.
- 13 The current approach to the census is unsustainable and is facing significant challenges. All over the world, it is becoming harder to get people to respond to the census, costs are steadily increasing, the census is vulnerable to external events such as natural disasters, and data quality is being impacted – particularly for smaller and hard-to-reach communities. Meanwhile, there is a growing demand for greater flexibility and responsiveness, and the faster delivery of more timely data and statistics. A modernised approach is needed to ensure the census will continue to meet the needs of New Zealand now and in the future, in a sustainable way.
- 14 Since the start of 2024, Stats NZ has been conducting ongoing targeted engagement with key stakeholders and partners (e.g. government agencies, iwi and Māori, key communities and groups, and academics) and has completed a round of public consultation on modernising our approach to census. Through public consultation, Stats NZ asked a range of questions to help understand how New Zealanders feel about more administrative data being used for census. Stats NZ also established a Future Census Independent Evaluation Panel to evaluate a range of administrative data-first options for census.
- 15 Administrative data is data already supplied by New Zealanders to organisations (government and private agencies) to support delivery of their routine business or services. Administrative data has been used in previous censuses to support the results of the census survey (e.g. by including people who did not respond to the survey or to fill information gaps).
- 16 Engagement showed that there was support for a modernised approach, but there was also support for a continuation of the full field enumeration census and a slower transition to an administrative data-first approach.
- 17 Following the engagement, evaluation, and design work, Stats NZ has therefore considered two options for the next census which are set out below.

Option A: One more full field enumeration census in 2028 (Not recommended)	
Next census	Subsequent censuses
<p>In 2028, Stats NZ will take a census by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> collecting census data using administrative data sources in the first instance supplementing this with a streamlined survey of the entire population (similar to the current approach used for 2023 Census) – with limited capacity to follow up with people who do not respond 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitioning to an approach in 2033 that replaces the streamlined survey of the entire population with a continuous Census Attribute Survey and tailored collection solutions Timelier delivery of data for customers, communities, and stakeholders from 2033 onwards

OR

Option B: Deliver Census in 2030 using new approach (preferred approach)	
Next census	Subsequent censuses
<p>In 2030, Stats NZ will take a census by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> collecting census data using administrative data sources in the first instance supplementing the administrative data by undertaking an annual sample survey (i.e. a Census Attribute Survey) and using other tailored solutions (e.g. targeted surveys) scheduling annual delivery of key population measures from late 2026, using admin data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing an approach where census data collection is undertaken on a continuous basis Progressively addressing the reduction in the accuracy of some data, particularly data on smaller population groups (e.g. Pacific people and disability communities)

The preferred approach

- 18 The Government Statistician's preferred approach is Option B – using administrative data combined with an annual sample survey (i.e. a continuous Census Attribute Survey) and other tailored solutions (e.g. targeted surveys).
- 19 Because the change is significant for Stats NZ and government agencies, more time is needed to lift the quality of administrative data, implement an annual sample survey, and adapt to the new delivery schedule. The success of the approach will require support from across government and agencies will be called on to help by improving the quality of data and building a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.
- 20 This will mean the official census count will occur in 2030, rather than 2028, to provide time for government agencies to adequately prepare. Stats NZ will then continue to collect and publish census data by combining these sources for subsequent censuses.
- 21 The Government Statistician is satisfied that the preferred approach provides:
 - a) a more effective transition to a modernised census so we can realise the benefits of the new approach faster
 - b) more flexibility and ability to manage the risks (present with each approach), especially on a 2030 timeframe.
- 22 Option A would be a more measured and slower transition; however, there are significant risks and therefore a lower likelihood of success. It is unlikely Option A could be delivered successfully within the current funding envelope given population growth, inflation, and possible external disruptions (e.g. severe weather, natural disasters, pandemics etc.).

- 23 The current funding envelope is significantly less than the 2023 Census Programme, limiting the use of activities that could help sustain data quality such as community supports and engagement, and mitigate risks such as the use of paper forms. This was a significant consideration in reaching the in-principle decision.
- 24 Under Option A, a reduction in response rates would also be expected, likely similar, or lower than the 2018 Census, which would lead to varying data quality levels for some variables, particularly those for smaller population groups. There is a limited ability to improve the quality of this data as there would be limited resources available to prioritise activities that could help.

The preferred approach will modernise the census and provide a range of benefits

- 25 **Making the census respond better to data needs, supporting the information needs of different communities.** The annual design of the Census Attribute Survey (CAS) provides greater flexibility to collect and publish different data to better meet the needs of users. This is because some of the variables collected in the CAS can be changed each year and tailored to better target our data collection. The current census approach can only be altered every five years.
- 26 **Improving quality over time.** After five years of CAS collection, coverage, data granularity, and accuracy will increase. A decline in data quality is expected if census were to continue to use a full-enumeration approach, given the steadily decreasing survey response rates. Administrative data also provides an opportunity to publish some data much more frequently than the traditional five-yearly approach.
- 27 **Reducing the burden for filling out surveys.** The CAS only needs five percent of the population to complete a survey each year, as opposed to the traditional approach where every person in New Zealand is expected to respond to the census survey every five years. Therefore, most New Zealanders will not be asked to complete a census survey across a five-year period or longer.
- 28 **Increasing efficiency by re-using data.** Government agencies already collect much of the data needed for the census. It is inefficient to continue to ask people to provide data that they have already provided to government and for the government to collect that data more than once.
- 29 **Reducing cost over time.** Once systems and infrastructure are in place, the cost to deliver census is expected to reduce over time, due to efficiency gains and being less impacted by the drivers that are increasing the costs of the current approach. In contrast, the cost of a traditional five-yearly full enumeration approach would continue to escalate over time.
- 30 **Building census resilience.** The new approach does not rely on a narrow collection period, which has been vulnerable to external events in the past – such as natural disasters – that have caused delays and significantly increased costs. Greater use of administrative data and the design of the CAS will reduce this risk and provide more resilience.
- 31 Developing and improving the government’s administrative data capabilities is essential to producing an accurate and high-quality census. Through these advancements, this shift will also support improved data for social investment, digital government, and other government priorities, such as the Government targets, as well as improving agency operations.

Impacts

- 32 Appendix 1 provides an overview of the expected quality and availability of census data under the preferred approach.

Data quality

- 33 As the census transitions to this new approach, and while work is underway to build administrative and CAS data, there will be an initial reduction in the quality of some census data, particularly regarding some data for smaller population groups (e.g. Pacific people and disability communities).
- 34 The initial reduced quality may include:
- a) data that has **low coverage**, meaning Stats NZ cannot be confident that initial data will be representative of all population groups
 - b) data that **lacks granularity**, meaning that for some variables, Stats NZ will not have the level of detail that has historically been available from census.
- 35 The accuracy (coverage and granularity) of data will build over time. Granular data for many variables will begin to be available from 2030 and the quality of data will improve over time as more data is collected. Stats NZ will develop tailored data collection approaches, including community-targeted surveys, to help meet data needs while we identify and realise new data sources. These approaches will be informed by further engagement to understand the needs of data users and communities and will continue to be developed while the shift progresses.
- 36 It is important to note that accuracy is only one aspect of quality. The preferred option performs well against other quality dimensions. For example, most data will be collected and published more frequently, which improves the timeliness and relevance dimensions of data quality.

Changes to the census delivery schedule

- 37 The official census count will be released in 2030, rather than 2028.
- 38 From late 2026, Stats NZ plans to release some key data (such as population counts and population structure – e.g. age, sex, location, ethnicity) using only administrative data sources, so that agencies and other users will have access to official, up-to-date data before the full 2030 Census release. This information will:
- a) be released as preliminary¹ statistics in 2026 and 2027, with annual official statistics beginning in 2028
 - b) ensure agencies continue to have the information they need to set electoral boundaries and determine the number of electorates for upcoming elections, undertake long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and inform population funding models.
- 39 Data on some variables will only be available from 2030 onwards because these variables are currently not well represented in administrative data and will need to be supplemented by the CAS and targeted survey information.
- 40 There will be an impact on products like the New Zealand Deprivation Index and the Severe Housing Deprivation Estimates, as new methods for producing these statistics will need to be developed to align with the changed data and delivery schedule. We expect these products to be delivered from 2030 onwards. Work is already underway to find an alternative way to produce the New Zealand Deprivation Index. From 2025 we will explore alternatives for products like the Severe Housing Deprivation estimates.

¹ 'Preliminary' or 'Experimental' statistics are the final phase of development of official statistics – the methodologies used to produce them may change following further testing or user feedback. A detailed technical report on data sources and methods, including any limitations, are published alongside the release of such statistics.

Legislative change

- 41 The Data and Statistics Act 2022 (the Act) will need to be amended to enable the preferred approach. The Minister of Statistics plans to seek Cabinet agreement to amend the Act to:
- a) allow for a census to be taken in 2030, rather than in 2028 as currently required
 - b) clarify the timing of data collection and publishing under the preferred approach. For example, to reflect that census data collection will occur on a continuous basis rather than as a one-off event (e.g. a census day) as the Act currently implies, and that some census variables could be released more regularly than every five years
 - c) simplify the notification process for data collection and clarify the requirements of the Government Statistician under the new approach.

Seeking support across government

- 42 Success of the preferred approach will require support and collective responsibility from across government. Agencies will be called on to help build reliable and high-quality administrative data across government. Stats NZ will need agencies to commit to:
- a) **addressing critical data gaps** – where administrative data is not of sufficient quality (e.g. disability data, Māori descent, level 4 ethnicity, iwi affiliation data)
 - b) **provide clean and accurate data** – the flow of high-quality data is essential for realising the benefits of administrative data in the data system
 - c) **consistently implement data standards** – greater interoperability will improve the quality and usability of data across the data system
 - d) **collecting data ethically** and within privacy and security frameworks to maintain trust – ethical and secure data flow across the data system is essential for maintaining public trust and confidence, social licence, and continued data supply.
- 43 Stats NZ will be reaching out to agencies to support understanding of the preferred approach, prepare agencies for the change, and identify what needs to be done to achieve success. Stats NZ will work with agencies to find solutions that are effective, practical, and affordable.

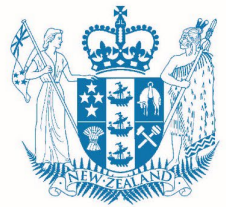
Next steps

Seeking Cabinet endorsement

- 44 Cabinet endorsement of the in-principle decision to transform the manner of taking the next census will be sought in March 2025. In the lead up to this, Stats NZ will spend the next several months focused on:
- a) the development of an implementation plan to share with agencies
 - b) undertaking robust and full costing of the approach
 - c) developing proposals to mobilise government agencies to provide the data needed
 - d) working across government to undertake an impact analysis (particularly where data quality might be lower) and to cost the supply of administrative data
 - e) making policy recommendations to amend the legislation (enabling the issuing of drafting instructions).
- 45 This will require Stats NZ to work closely with agencies. As part of the implementation planning, Stats NZ will also begin planning for a second round of public consultation on the data to be collected in the census.

Supplementary information: Expected quality and availability of census data under the preferred approach

Key use(s)	Census data variables	Availability	Initial data quality Note: Quality will improve over time	
Justice (electoral)				
Setting the number of electorates and electoral boundaries	Usually resident population (most granular)	2023 - Available now, used for 2026 Election 2028 - Data available for 2029 Election 2031 - Data available for 2032 Election	Comparable or improved quality	
	Māori descent usually resident population (most granular)		Change in initial quality	
Social sector (social investment, health, Te Tiriti and smaller communities)				
<div>High-quality data on:<ul style="list-style-type: none">small population groups, geographic areas, and cross-tabulationshousehold and family living situations</div> <div>Used to inform evidence-based interventions such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">access to health services, unmet need, and health outcome disparitiesTreaty of Waitangi settlementsEvidence-based policy for population groups (e.g. disability issues, ethnic communities)</div> <div><i>Note: Child poverty measurement will not be impacted and could be improved under the proposed change</i></div>	Usually resident population (most granular) – incl. age	2026 / 27 - Early transitional measures (admin-based) 2028 - Official measures	Comparable or improved quality	
	Māori descent	2026 - Annual provisional population counts 2030 - Official population counts	Change in initial quality	
	Iwi affiliation data	2030 - Population counts and profiles (using historic census data)	Significant decrease in initial quality	
	Ethnicity data	2028 - Broad ethnicity categories – official measures 2029 - Detailed ethnicity categories – estimates	Moderate decrease in initial quality	
	Small population data	2030 - Population counts and profiles (using historic census data)	Significant decrease in initial quality	
	Deprivation index	2023 - Data available now (2023 Census)	Alternative measurement approach required	
	Activity limitations	2029 - Estimates (with some provisional measures in 2028)	Change in initial quality	
	Other demographics: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Household and family contextLanguages spokenGender and related variables	2029 - Estimates (with some provisional measures in 2028)	Moderate decrease in initial quality	
Housing and infrastructure				
<div>High-quality data on:<ul style="list-style-type: none">housing supply and demandconditions of access to housing & tenurenature and distribution of dwelling stock</div> <div>Used to inform evidence-based interventions such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">infrastructure planninglocal government long-term and transport planningdisaster recovery planning</div>	Dwelling location (address) and type	2030/31 - Official measures	Change in initial quality	
	Dwelling type, tenure, housing condition and access	2030/31 - Estimates	Moderate decrease in initial quality	
	Occupancy status	2030/2031 - Official measures	Change in initial quality	
	Combined information on people, dwellings & location	2030/2031 - Official measures	Significant decrease in initial quality	
	Severe Housing Deprivation	2024 - Estimates using 2023 Census data 2030 - Estimates using survey-based outputs	Alternative measurement approach required	
Education				
Research and evaluation of education provision and initiatives School network forecasting , planning and prioritisation of school property	Highest education qualifications and household composition	2028 - Provisional measure 2029 - Official measure	Moderate decrease in initial quality	
	Hours of work and occupation	2030 - Estimates	Moderate decrease in initial quality	
	Place of usual residence	2026 / 27 - Early transitional measures (admin-based) 2028 - Official measures	Comparable or improved quality	
Key:	Comparable or improved quality: Similar or improved coverage, accuracy, granularity, and frequency	Change in initial quality: Slight decrease in coverage and accuracy but Improved granularity and frequency	Moderate decrease in initial quality: Decreased coverage and accuracy for small groups but increased frequency	Significant decrease in initial quality: Substantial reduction in quality.



Rt Hon Christopher Luxon,
Prime Minister

7 November 2024

Dear Prime Minister

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the future of census

Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years surveying the entire population. The census supports various critical functions across government, including setting of electoral boundaries, long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and population funding models.

The current approach to the census is unsustainable and facing significant challenges. The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years and had a response rate that fell short of the 90% target. Continuing with the status quo will result in costs continuing to rise and response rates continuing to decline.

Stats NZ has undertaken a public consultation, received advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel on options for the future of census, and presented two options for the Government Statistician's consideration. The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision on the preferred approach, which the attached briefing sets out.

The Government Statistician's preferred approach is a significant shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey. The change will result in a delay and temporary reduction in the accuracy of some data – particularly data on smaller population groups. However, the benefits of this change are substantial. In time, the preferred approach will mean Stats NZ can deliver key statistics faster, more frequently, with higher quality, and at a reduced cost. The census will also be more resilient to external events (like earthquakes) and more responsive to changing data needs. The preferred approach will require legislative change and will rely on direct support from across government to improve the quality of data, address data gaps, and build a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.

The Government Statistician cannot implement this change without Cabinet's endorsement. I intend to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision in March 2025. I am writing to you to highlight the significance of this decision and encourage you to engage with your agencies on what this means for your portfolios ahead of Cabinet.

Beginning today, Stats NZ will be reaching out to inform your agencies of the in-principle decision. Stats NZ will spend the next several months working with them to support understanding of the preferred approach and identify what needs to be done to achieve success. If you wish to meet with the Government Statistician directly to discuss the decision and what it means for you and your portfolios please reach out to my office or to the Office of the Government Statistician at OfficeoftheGSCE@stats.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Bayly'.

Hon Andrew Bayly
Minister of Statistics



Hon Nicola Willis,
Minister of Finance
Minister for Social Investment

7 November 2024

Dear Hon Nicola Willis

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the future of census

Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years surveying the entire population. The census supports various critical functions across government, including setting of electoral boundaries, long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and population funding models.

The current approach to the census is unsustainable and facing significant challenges. The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years and had a response rate that fell short of the 90% target. Continuing with the status quo will result in costs continuing to rise and response rates continuing to decline.

Stats NZ has undertaken a public consultation, received advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel on options for the future of census, and presented two options for the Government Statistician's consideration. The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision on the preferred approach, which the attached briefing sets out.

The Government Statistician's preferred approach is a significant shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey. The change will result in a delay and temporary reduction in the accuracy of some data – particularly data on smaller population groups. However, the benefits of this change are substantial. In time, the preferred approach will mean Stats NZ can deliver key statistics faster, more frequently, with higher quality, and at a reduced cost. The census will also be more resilient to external events (like earthquakes) and more responsive to changing data needs. The preferred approach will require legislative change and will rely on direct support from across government to improve the quality of data, address data gaps, and build a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.

The Government Statistician cannot implement this change without Cabinet's endorsement. I intend to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision in March 2025. I am writing to you to highlight the significance of this decision and encourage you to engage with your agencies on what this means for your portfolios ahead of Cabinet.

Beginning today, Stats NZ will be reaching out to inform your agencies of the in-principle decision. Stats NZ will spend the next several months working with them to support understanding of the preferred approach and identify what needs to be done to achieve success. If you wish to meet with the Government Statistician directly to discuss the decision and what it means for you and your portfolios please reach out to my office or to the Office of the Government Statistician at OfficeoftheGSCE@stats.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'A. Bayly'.

Hon Andrew Bayly
Minister of Statistics



Hon Chris Bishop,
Minister of Housing

7 November 2024

Dear Hon Chris Bishop

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the future of census

Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years surveying the entire population. The census supports various critical functions across government, including setting of electoral boundaries, long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and population funding models.

The current approach to the census is unsustainable and facing significant challenges. The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years and had a response rate that fell short of the 90% target. Continuing with the status quo will result in costs continuing to rise and response rates continuing to decline.

Stats NZ has undertaken a public consultation, received advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel on options for the future of census, and presented two options for the Government Statistician's consideration. The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision on the preferred approach, which the attached briefing sets out.

The Government Statistician's preferred approach is a significant shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey. The change will result in a delay and temporary reduction in the accuracy of some data – particularly data on smaller population groups. However, the benefits of this change are substantial. In time, the preferred approach will mean Stats NZ can deliver key statistics faster, more frequently, with higher quality, and at a reduced cost. The census will also be more resilient to external events (like earthquakes) and more responsive to changing data needs. The preferred approach will require legislative change and will rely on direct support from across government to improve the quality of data, address data gaps, and build a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.

The Government Statistician cannot implement this change without Cabinet's endorsement. I intend to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision in March 2025. I am writing to you to highlight the significance of this decision and encourage you to engage with your agencies on what this means for your portfolios ahead of Cabinet.

Beginning today, Stats NZ will be reaching out to inform your agencies of the in-principle decision. Stats NZ will spend the next several months working with them to support understanding of the preferred approach and identify what needs to be done to achieve success. If you wish to meet with the Government Statistician directly to discuss the decision and what it means for you and your portfolios please reach out to my office or to the Office of the Government Statistician at OfficeoftheGSCE@stats.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'A. Bayly'.

Hon Andrew Bayly
Minister of Statistics



Hon Dr Shane Reti
Minister of Health
Minister for Pacific Peoples

7 November 2024

Dear Hon Dr Shane Reti

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the future of census

Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years surveying the entire population. The census supports various critical functions across government, including setting of electoral boundaries, long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and population funding models.

The current approach to the census is unsustainable and facing significant challenges. The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years and had a response rate that fell short of the 90% target. Continuing with the status quo will result in costs continuing to rise and response rates continuing to decline.

Stats NZ has undertaken a public consultation, received advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel on options for the future of census, and presented two options for the Government Statistician's consideration. The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision on the preferred approach, which the attached briefing sets out.

The Government Statistician's preferred approach is a significant shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey. The change will result in a delay and temporary reduction in the accuracy of some data – particularly data on smaller population groups. However, the benefits of this change are substantial. In time, the preferred approach will mean Stats NZ can deliver key statistics faster, more frequently, with higher quality, and at a reduced cost. The census will also be more resilient to external events (like earthquakes) and more responsive to changing data needs. The preferred approach will require legislative change and will rely on direct support from across government to improve the quality of data, address data gaps, and build a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.

The Government Statistician cannot implement this change without Cabinet's endorsement. I intend to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision in March 2025. I am writing to you to highlight the significance of this decision and encourage you to engage with your agencies on what this means for your portfolios ahead of Cabinet.

Beginning today, Stats NZ will be reaching out to inform your agencies of the in-principle decision. Stats NZ will spend the next several months working with them to support understanding of the preferred approach and identify what needs to be done to achieve success. If you wish to meet with the Government Statistician directly to discuss the decision and what it means for you and your portfolios please reach out to my office or to the Office of the Government Statistician at OfficeoftheGSCE@stats.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'A. Bayly'.

Hon Andrew Bayly
Minister of Statistics



Hon Melissa Lee
Minister for Ethnic Communities

7 November 2024

Dear Hon Melissa Lee

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the future of census

Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years surveying the entire population. The census supports various critical functions across government, including setting of electoral boundaries, long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and population funding models.

The current approach to the census is unsustainable and facing significant challenges. The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years and had a response rate that fell short of the 90% target. Continuing with the status quo will result in costs continuing to rise and response rates continuing to decline.

Stats NZ has undertaken a public consultation, received advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel on options for the future of census, and presented two options for the Government Statistician's consideration. The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision on the preferred approach, which the attached briefing sets out.

The Government Statistician's preferred approach is a significant shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey. The change will result in a delay and temporary reduction in the accuracy of some data – particularly data on smaller population groups. However, the benefits of this change are substantial. In time, the preferred approach will mean Stats NZ can deliver key statistics faster, more frequently, with higher quality, and at a reduced cost. The census will also be more resilient to external events (like earthquakes) and more responsive to changing data needs. The preferred approach will require legislative change and will rely on direct support from across government to improve the quality of data, address data gaps, and build a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.

The Government Statistician cannot implement this change without Cabinet's endorsement. I intend to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision in March 2025. I am writing to you to highlight the significance of this decision and encourage you to engage with your agencies on what this means for your portfolios ahead of Cabinet.

Beginning today, Stats NZ will be reaching out to inform your agencies of the in-principle decision. Stats NZ will spend the next several months working with them to support understanding of the preferred approach and identify what needs to be done to achieve success. If you wish to meet with the Government Statistician directly to discuss the decision and what it means for you and your portfolios please reach out to my office or to the Office of the Government Statistician at OfficeoftheGSCE@stats.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Bayly'.

Hon Andrew Bayly
Minister of Statistics



Hon Erica Stanford
Minister of Education
Minister of Immigration

7 November 2024

Dear Hon Erica Stanford

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the future of census

Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years surveying the entire population. The census supports various critical functions across government, including setting of electoral boundaries, long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and population funding models.

The current approach to the census is unsustainable and facing significant challenges. The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years and had a response rate that fell short of the 90% target. Continuing with the status quo will result in costs continuing to rise and response rates continuing to decline.

Stats NZ has undertaken a public consultation, received advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel on options for the future of census, and presented two options for the Government Statistician's consideration. The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision on the preferred approach, which the attached briefing sets out.

The Government Statistician's preferred approach is a significant shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey. The change will result in a delay and temporary reduction in the accuracy of some data – particularly data on smaller population groups. However, the benefits of this change are substantial. In time, the preferred approach will mean Stats NZ can deliver key statistics faster, more frequently, with higher quality, and at a reduced cost. The census will also be more resilient to external events (like earthquakes) and more responsive to changing data needs. The preferred approach will require legislative change and will rely on direct support from across government to improve the quality of data, address data gaps, and build a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.

The Government Statistician cannot implement this change without Cabinet's endorsement. I intend to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision in March 2025. I am writing to you to highlight the significance of this decision and encourage you to engage with your agencies on what this means for your portfolios ahead of Cabinet.

Beginning today, Stats NZ will be reaching out to inform your agencies of the in-principle decision. Stats NZ will spend the next several months working with them to support understanding of the preferred approach and identify what needs to be done to achieve success. If you wish to meet with the Government Statistician directly to discuss the decision and what it means for you and your portfolios please reach out to my office or to the Office of the Government Statistician at OfficeoftheGSCE@stats.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Bayly'.

Hon Andrew Bayly
Minister of Statistics



Hon Louise Upston
Minister for Social Development and Employment
Minister for Disability Issues

7 November 2024

Dear Hon Louise Upston

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the future of census

Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years surveying the entire population. The census supports various critical functions across government, including setting of electoral boundaries, long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and population funding models.

The current approach to the census is unsustainable and facing significant challenges. The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years and had a response rate that fell short of the 90% target. Continuing with the status quo will result in costs continuing to rise and response rates continuing to decline.

Stats NZ has undertaken a public consultation, received advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel on options for the future of census, and presented two options for the Government Statistician's consideration. The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision on the preferred approach, which the attached briefing sets out.

The Government Statistician's preferred approach is a significant shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey. The change will result in a delay and temporary reduction in the accuracy of some data – particularly data on smaller population groups. However, the benefits of this change are substantial. In time, the preferred approach will mean Stats NZ can deliver key statistics faster, more frequently, with higher quality, and at a reduced cost. The census will also be more resilient to external events (like earthquakes) and more responsive to changing data needs. The preferred approach will require legislative change and will rely on direct support from across government to improve the quality of data, address data gaps, and build a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.

The Government Statistician cannot implement this change without Cabinet's endorsement. I intend to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision in March 2025. I am writing to you to highlight the significance of this decision and encourage you to engage with your agencies on what this means for your portfolios ahead of Cabinet.

Beginning today, Stats NZ will be reaching out to inform your agencies of the in-principle decision. Stats NZ will spend the next several months working with them to support understanding of the preferred approach and identify what needs to be done to achieve success. If you wish to meet with the Government Statistician directly to discuss the decision and what it means for you and your portfolios please reach out to my office or to the Office of the Government Statistician at OfficeoftheGSCE@stats.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Bayly'.

Hon Andrew Bayly
Minister of Statistics



Hon Judith Collins KC
Minister for Digitising Government

7 November 2024

Dear Hon Judith Collins KC

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the future of census

Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years surveying the entire population. The census supports various critical functions across government, including setting of electoral boundaries, long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and population funding models.

The current approach to the census is unsustainable and facing significant challenges. The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years and had a response rate that fell short of the 90% target. Continuing with the status quo will result in costs continuing to rise and response rates continuing to decline.

Stats NZ has undertaken a public consultation, received advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel on options for the future of census, and presented two options for the Government Statistician's consideration. The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision on the preferred approach, which the attached briefing sets out.

The Government Statistician's preferred approach is a significant shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey. The change will result in a delay and temporary reduction in the accuracy of some data – particularly data on smaller population groups. However, the benefits of this change are substantial. In time, the preferred approach will mean Stats NZ can deliver key statistics faster, more frequently, with higher quality, and at a reduced cost. The census will also be more resilient to external events (like earthquakes) and more responsive to changing data needs. The preferred approach will require legislative change and will rely on direct support from across government to improve the quality of data, address data gaps, and build a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.

The Government Statistician cannot implement this change without Cabinet's endorsement. I intend to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision in March 2025. I am writing to you to highlight the significance of this decision and encourage you to engage with your agencies on what this means for your portfolios ahead of Cabinet.

Beginning today, Stats NZ will be reaching out to inform your agencies of the in-principle decision. Stats NZ will spend the next several months working with them to support understanding of the preferred approach and identify what needs to be done to achieve success. If you wish to meet with the Government Statistician directly to discuss the decision and what it means for you and your portfolios please reach out to my office or to the Office of the Government Statistician at OfficeoftheGSCE@stats.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'A. Bayly'.

Hon Andrew Bayly
Minister of Statistics



Rt Hon Winston Peters
Deputy Prime Minister

7 November 2024

Dear Rt Hon Winston Peters

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the future of census

Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years surveying the entire population. The census supports various critical functions across government, including setting of electoral boundaries, long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and population funding models.

The current approach to the census is unsustainable and facing significant challenges. The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years and had a response rate that fell short of the 90% target. Continuing with the status quo will result in costs continuing to rise and response rates continuing to decline.

Stats NZ has undertaken a public consultation, received advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel on options for the future of census, and presented two options for the Government Statistician's consideration. The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision on the preferred approach, which the attached briefing sets out.

The Government Statistician's preferred approach is a significant shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey. The change will result in a delay and temporary reduction in the accuracy of some data – particularly data on smaller population groups. However, the benefits of this change are substantial. In time, the preferred approach will mean Stats NZ can deliver key statistics faster, more frequently, with higher quality, and at a reduced cost. The census will also be more resilient to external events (like earthquakes) and more responsive to changing data needs. The preferred approach will require legislative change and will rely on direct support from across government to improve the quality of data, address data gaps, and build a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.

The Government Statistician cannot implement this change without Cabinet's endorsement. I intend to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision in March 2025. I am writing to you to highlight the significance of this decision and encourage you to engage with your agencies on what this means for your portfolios ahead of Cabinet.

Beginning today, Stats NZ will be reaching out to inform your agencies of the in-principle decision. Stats NZ will spend the next several months working with them to support understanding of the preferred approach and identify what needs to be done to achieve success. If you wish to meet with the Government Statistician directly to discuss the decision and what it means for you and your portfolios please reach out to my office or to the Office of the Government Statistician at OfficeoftheGSCE@stats.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Bayly'.

Hon Andrew Bayly
Minister of Statistics



Hon Simeon Brown
Minister of Transport

7 November 2024

Dear Hon Simeon Brown

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the future of census

Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years surveying the entire population. The census supports various critical functions across government, including setting of electoral boundaries, long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and population funding models.

The current approach to the census is unsustainable and facing significant challenges. The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years and had a response rate that fell short of the 90% target. Continuing with the status quo will result in costs continuing to rise and response rates continuing to decline.

Stats NZ has undertaken a public consultation, received advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel on options for the future of census, and presented two options for the Government Statistician's consideration. The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision on the preferred approach, which the attached briefing sets out.

The Government Statistician's preferred approach is a significant shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey. The change will result in a delay and temporary reduction in the accuracy of some data – particularly data on smaller population groups. However, the benefits of this change are substantial. In time, the preferred approach will mean Stats NZ can deliver key statistics faster, more frequently, with higher quality, and at a reduced cost. The census will also be more resilient to external events (like earthquakes) and more responsive to changing data needs. The preferred approach will require legislative change and will rely on direct support from across government to improve the quality of data, address data gaps, and build a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.

The Government Statistician cannot implement this change without Cabinet's endorsement. I intend to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision in March 2025. I am writing to you to highlight the significance of this decision and encourage you to engage with your agencies on what this means for your portfolios ahead of Cabinet.

Beginning today, Stats NZ will be reaching out to inform your agencies of the in-principle decision. Stats NZ will spend the next several months working with them to support understanding of the preferred approach and identify what needs to be done to achieve success. If you wish to meet with the Government Statistician directly to discuss the decision and what it means for you and your portfolios please reach out to my office or to the Office of the Government Statistician at OfficeoftheGSCE@stats.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'A. Bayly'.

Hon Andrew Bayly
Minister of Statistics



Hon Mark Mitchell
Minister of Police

7 November 2024

Dear Hon Mark Mitchell

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the future of census

Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years surveying the entire population. The census supports various critical functions across government, including setting of electoral boundaries, long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and population funding models.

The current approach to the census is unsustainable and facing significant challenges. The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years and had a response rate that fell short of the 90% target. Continuing with the status quo will result in costs continuing to rise and response rates continuing to decline.

Stats NZ has undertaken a public consultation, received advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel on options for the future of census, and presented two options for the Government Statistician's consideration. The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision on the preferred approach, which the attached briefing sets out.

The Government Statistician's preferred approach is a significant shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey. The change will result in a delay and temporary reduction in the accuracy of some data – particularly data on smaller population groups. However, the benefits of this change are substantial. In time, the preferred approach will mean Stats NZ can deliver key statistics faster, more frequently, with higher quality, and at a reduced cost. The census will also be more resilient to external events (like earthquakes) and more responsive to changing data needs. The preferred approach will require legislative change and will rely on direct support from across government to improve the quality of data, address data gaps, and build a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.

The Government Statistician cannot implement this change without Cabinet's endorsement. I intend to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision in March 2025. I am writing to you to highlight the significance of this decision and encourage you to engage with your agencies on what this means for your portfolios ahead of Cabinet.

Beginning today, Stats NZ will be reaching out to inform your agencies of the in-principle decision. Stats NZ will spend the next several months working with them to support understanding of the preferred approach and identify what needs to be done to achieve success. If you wish to meet with the Government Statistician directly to discuss the decision and what it means for you and your portfolios please reach out to my office or to the Office of the Government Statistician at OfficeoftheGSCE@stats.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Bayly'.

Hon Andrew Bayly
Minister of Statistics



Hon Tama Potaka
Minister for Māori Development

7 November 2024

Dear Hon Tama Potaka

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the future of census

Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years surveying the entire population. The census supports various critical functions across government, including setting of electoral boundaries, long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and population funding models.

The current approach to the census is unsustainable and facing significant challenges. The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years and had a response rate that fell short of the 90% target. Continuing with the status quo will result in costs continuing to rise and response rates continuing to decline.

Stats NZ has undertaken a public consultation, received advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel on options for the future of census, and presented two options for the Government Statistician's consideration. The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision on the preferred approach, which the attached briefing sets out.

The Government Statistician's preferred approach is a significant shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey. The change will result in a delay and temporary reduction in the accuracy of some data – particularly data on smaller population groups. However, the benefits of this change are substantial. In time, the preferred approach will mean Stats NZ can deliver key statistics faster, more frequently, with higher quality, and at a reduced cost. The census will also be more resilient to external events (like earthquakes) and more responsive to changing data needs. The preferred approach will require legislative change and will rely on direct support from across government to improve the quality of data, address data gaps, and build a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.

The Government Statistician cannot implement this change without Cabinet's endorsement. I intend to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision in March 2025. I am writing to you to highlight the significance of this decision and encourage you to engage with your agencies on what this means for your portfolios ahead of Cabinet.

Beginning today, Stats NZ will be reaching out to inform your agencies of the in-principle decision. Stats NZ will spend the next several months working with them to support understanding of the preferred approach and identify what needs to be done to achieve success. If you wish to meet with the Government Statistician directly to discuss the decision and what it means for you and your portfolios please reach out to my office or to the Office of the Government Statistician at OfficeoftheGSCE@stats.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'A. Bayly'.

Hon Andrew Bayly
Minister of Statistics



Hon Simon Watts
Minister of Revenue

7 November 2024

Dear Hon Simon Watts

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the future of census

Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years surveying the entire population. The census supports various critical functions across government, including setting of electoral boundaries, long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and population funding models.

The current approach to the census is unsustainable and facing significant challenges. The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years and had a response rate that fell short of the 90% target. Continuing with the status quo will result in costs continuing to rise and response rates continuing to decline.

Stats NZ has undertaken a public consultation, received advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel on options for the future of census, and presented two options for the Government Statistician's consideration. The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision on the preferred approach, which the attached briefing sets out.

The Government Statistician's preferred approach is a significant shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey. The change will result in a delay and temporary reduction in the accuracy of some data – particularly data on smaller population groups. However, the benefits of this change are substantial. In time, the preferred approach will mean Stats NZ can deliver key statistics faster, more frequently, with higher quality, and at a reduced cost. The census will also be more resilient to external events (like earthquakes) and more responsive to changing data needs. The preferred approach will require legislative change and will rely on direct support from across government to improve the quality of data, address data gaps, and build a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.

The Government Statistician cannot implement this change without Cabinet's endorsement. I intend to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision in March 2025. I am writing to you to highlight the significance of this decision and encourage you to engage with your agencies on what this means for your portfolios ahead of Cabinet.

Beginning today, Stats NZ will be reaching out to inform your agencies of the in-principle decision. Stats NZ will spend the next several months working with them to support understanding of the preferred approach and identify what needs to be done to achieve success. If you wish to meet with the Government Statistician directly to discuss the decision and what it means for you and your portfolios please reach out to my office or to the Office of the Government Statistician at OfficeoftheGSCE@stats.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'A. Bayly'.

Hon Andrew Bayly
Minister of Statistics



Hon Brooke van Velden
Minister of Internal Affairs

7 November 2024

Dear Hon Brooke van Velden

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the future of census

Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years surveying the entire population. The census supports various critical functions across government, including setting of electoral boundaries, long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and population funding models.

The current approach to the census is unsustainable and facing significant challenges. The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years and had a response rate that fell short of the 90% target. Continuing with the status quo will result in costs continuing to rise and response rates continuing to decline.

Stats NZ has undertaken a public consultation, received advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel on options for the future of census, and presented two options for the Government Statistician's consideration. The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision on the preferred approach, which the attached briefing sets out.

The Government Statistician's preferred approach is a significant shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey. The change will result in a delay and temporary reduction in the accuracy of some data – particularly data on smaller population groups. However, the benefits of this change are substantial. In time, the preferred approach will mean Stats NZ can deliver key statistics faster, more frequently, with higher quality, and at a reduced cost. The census will also be more resilient to external events (like earthquakes) and more responsive to changing data needs. The preferred approach will require legislative change and will rely on direct support from across government to improve the quality of data, address data gaps, and build a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.

The Government Statistician cannot implement this change without Cabinet's endorsement. I intend to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision in March 2025. I am writing to you to highlight the significance of this decision and encourage you to engage with your agencies on what this means for your portfolios ahead of Cabinet.

Beginning today, Stats NZ will be reaching out to inform your agencies of the in-principle decision. Stats NZ will spend the next several months working with them to support understanding of the preferred approach and identify what needs to be done to achieve success. If you wish to meet with the Government Statistician directly to discuss the decision and what it means for you and your portfolios please reach out to my office or to the Office of the Government Statistician at OfficeoftheGSCE@stats.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'A. Bayly'.

Hon Andrew Bayly
Minister of Statistics



Hon David Seymour
Minister for Regulation

7 November 2024

Dear Hon David Seymour

The Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the future of census

Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years surveying the entire population. The census supports various critical functions across government, including setting of electoral boundaries, long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and population funding models.

The current approach to the census is unsustainable and facing significant challenges. The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years and had a response rate that fell short of the 90% target. Continuing with the status quo will result in costs continuing to rise and response rates continuing to decline.

Stats NZ has undertaken a public consultation, received advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel on options for the future of census, and presented two options for the Government Statistician's consideration. The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision on the preferred approach, which the attached briefing sets out.

The Government Statistician's preferred approach is a significant shift away from the traditional five-yearly census survey. The change will result in a delay and temporary reduction in the accuracy of some data – particularly data on smaller population groups. However, the benefits of this change are substantial. In time, the preferred approach will mean Stats NZ can deliver key statistics faster, more frequently, with higher quality, and at a reduced cost. The census will also be more resilient to external events (like earthquakes) and more responsive to changing data needs. The preferred approach will require legislative change and will rely on direct support from across government to improve the quality of data, address data gaps, and build a high-quality pipeline of administrative data.

The Government Statistician cannot implement this change without Cabinet's endorsement. I intend to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision in March 2025. I am writing to you to highlight the significance of this decision and encourage you to engage with your agencies on what this means for your portfolios ahead of Cabinet.

Beginning today, Stats NZ will be reaching out to inform your agencies of the in-principle decision. Stats NZ will spend the next several months working with them to support understanding of the preferred approach and identify what needs to be done to achieve success. If you wish to meet with the Government Statistician directly to discuss the decision and what it means for you and your portfolios please reach out to my office or to the Office of the Government Statistician at OfficeoftheGSCE@stats.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Bayly'.

Hon Andrew Bayly
Minister of Statistics