



Submission on Data and Statistics (Census) Amendment Bill

To the Justice Committee

15 April 2026

Introduction

High-quality population data is essential for councils to govern effectively. LGNZ is concerned that moving to an administrative census will degrade the quality of data available to councils.

It appears that cost, not data quality, is the primary driver for moving to an administrative census. While this move might save money initially, it would be very costly for local government – and for New Zealand – if data quality decreased.

Local government heavily relies on accurate population data, particularly for upcoming reform

Local government uses census data for a wide range of tasks. This includes everything from asset management planning and representation reviews to day-to-day delivery of services like public transport. The [Regulatory Impact Assessment](#) from Stats NZ comments on this potential impact:

Any significant reduction in data accuracy, detail, and coverage would impact local government long-term planning, service delivery, and ability to understand the needs of their communities.

A specific example of councils using census data is housing and business development capacity assessments (HBAs). HBAs are an important local government planning tool that is aligned with the Government’s Going for Housing Growth programme and specifically required by central government through the National Planning Statement on Urban Development. Census data is used to help assess future housing demand, business land needs, migration patterns, labour force characteristics, and the capacity of existing infrastructure and transport networks to support growth. Having accurate, highly localised data is critical to producing robust HBAs that inform long-term financial strategies, spatial planning decisions, and infrastructure investment.

Any reduction in data quality in the short-to-medium term would also affect the upcoming implementation of significant government reforms. Good quality population data will be crucial for effective delivery of the Government’s “Simplifying Local Government” proposal and resource management reform. Councils will be required to develop new spatial plans for their



regions over the next couple of years that will rely on detailed local data. There are further concerns here with the date of the next census being delayed two years from 2028 to 2030.

The change to an administrative census risks local government either being forced to make decisions with suboptimal data or having to take on significant costs of doing their own surveys.

We have concerns about the accuracy of data from an administrative census

In 2024, Stats NZ convened a panel of independent experts to evaluate five options for the future of the census. The [Future Census Independent Evaluation Panel report](#) found that New Zealand was not ready for a move to an administrative census:

It is the view of the Panel that the official statistics system of NZ is not likely to be capable of implementing any of Options 3-5 [the options involving a census based fully on administrative data] in the time required for the Census 2028 cycle. In addition, without significant commitment to a concerted effort to improve admin data, these options will not be possible for the Census 2033 cycle.

LGNZ is uncomfortable with the Government moving ahead with an administrative census when an independent panel of experts recommended maintaining a traditional or hybrid census.

Stats NZ, in its [response to the Panel's report](#), sets out how it went back to the Independent Panel and asked it to reconsider its recommendations in light of the Government's budget constraints. The Independent Panel was reconvened and determined that "that the recommendations in its report were robust and remained appropriate".

Stats NZ's rationale for not accepting the Panel's recommendations around maintaining a traditional or hybrid census in 2028 was that option "could not be implemented within available funding".

Our recommendation: keep a traditional or hybrid census in place until an administrative census can be shown to produce accurate data

This is a particularly risky time for the Government to be substantially changing how New Zealand conducts its census. LGNZ asks that we step carefully and ensure that any new system can produce good quality data before moving to it.

This is consistent with [Stats NZ's statutory review into the 2023 Census](#) conducted by two independent experts:

...moving from a traditional census to administrative data to enumerate the population is very complicated. In principle, great care and caution should be used by any organisation attempting the shift. While administrative data availability has grown



considerably and techniques are improving, the move to an administrative census should only occur if it can produce data which are of similar quality or better, relative to the traditional or hybrid methods.

LGNZ recommends that a traditional or hybrid census method should be used until we are clear that data is of a similar quality or better from an administrative census.