

Submission to Statistics New Zealand on the:

Proposed data collection approach and content for the Census

Submitted by the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions Te Kauae Kaimahi

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This submission is made on behalf of the 32 unions affiliated to the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions Te Kauae Kaimahi (NZCTU). With over 340,000 union members, the NZCTU is one of the largest democratic organisations in New Zealand.

The NZCTU acknowledges Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand and formally acknowledges this through Te Rūnanga o Ngā Kaimahi Māori o Aotearoa (Te Rūnanga), the Māori arm of Te Kauae Kaimahi (NZCTU), which represents approximately 60,000 Māori workers.

General comments

1. The NZCTU welcomes the opportunity to comment on potential data content for the revised census model.
2. We note the importance of the census as the highest-quality source of population and dwelling data in New Zealand. Census data allows us to understand population and dwelling distribution and change over time and how people are connected to employment, public services, and their communities. This data is essential for, setting electoral boundaries, planning infrastructure, developing policy, providing the foundation for other nationally critical surveys, and understanding who we are as a society. From the perspective of the NZCTU, this data is particularly useful in understanding developments in employment, occupation, and income across different parts and populations of the country.
3. New Zealand will continue to experience significant population change in the coming decades, driven among other things by an ageing population and volatile migration flows. It is critical we accurately apprehend the changing nature of our population going forward so that we can identify how to respond to any associated challenges.
4. The NZCTU is concerned about the potential negative impact that the move to the mixed model of administrative data plus annual rolling surveys will have on data quality and comparability over time. Our view is that the potential impacts of this change have not been sufficiently explored, at least in publicly communicated information.
5. The consultation document does acknowledge at various points that, under the new model, there may be implications for data collection and comparability. For example, on page 17 it is noted that topics such as housing conditions and religious affiliation are not covered by administrative data sources and would need to be collected through the annual survey (which will only cover 5% of the population each year), but that “there may be limitations in how this data can be analysed alongside other variables”. However, no further information is provided on this or other potential impacts on other topics.
6. Given the centrality of the census in our statistics infrastructure, we believe it is necessary for Statistics NZ to analyse and make publicly available the potential implications for data quality and consistency over time for all of the core census questions. This would greatly assist stakeholders and the wider public in understanding the potential implications of this

change. Given that statistics is a highly technical field, this information would also better enable stakeholders to provide robust and useful feedback on what may need to be done to ensure census data remains high quality and fit for its diverse purposes.

7. Additionally, while this is outside the scope of the present consultation, we note that the platform on which New Zealand census data is held – Aotearoa Data Explorer – is not user-friendly. We recommend resource is put into improving the accessibility of this important data so that civil society actors and the wider public can understand and use it.

Comments on content

8. The NZCTU supports maintaining the range of census topics outlined in Table 4 (page 20) of the consultation document. We comment on specific topics below.
9. *Occupation data.* We emphasise the importance of collecting occupation data that is as granular as possible, i.e., ANZSCO level 5. This is a vital source of information for the NZCTU and trade unions in understanding the nature of the New Zealand workforce, wage differentials between and within occupations, the changing structure of the New Zealand labour market, the emergence of new occupations, and understanding job quality, among other things. This data is necessary for a wide range of policy areas, including employment relations, skills and training, immigration, workforce planning, and wage policy.
10. *Quality of life indicators.* We recommend collecting information on quality of life and strongly recommend that quality of work questions are included as part of this. Quality of work is an important component of people's reported quality of life. Since 2018, when the results from the last Survey of Working Life were published, we have not had longitudinal data on important aspects of working life such as job satisfaction, elements of occupational health and safety, and flexibility of employment. We understand that the SWL was discontinued in an effort to maintain high response rates for the HLFS. The annual census surveys that are planned provide an opportunity for reestablishing some of this data collection. This information would be used by trade unions in identifying areas and populations where good work is prevalent and areas and populations in which attention is needed to improve the quality of work.
11. *Income amount by income source.* We recommend collecting data on income amount by source. This will be valuable in helping understand changing patterns in income sources among different cohorts – for example, people who work multiple jobs, or people with a mix of labour and investment income. From a trade union perspective, this is particularly useful in helping to build a picture of whether workers are earning adequate income in their main jobs, and, if not, where the problems are concentrated by industry, occupation, and population characteristics. This data would also be useful in contributing to our understanding, over time, of structural change in the labour market – such as more workers having to supplement their main job with other work. These insights can already be developed to an extent from existing data, but collecting data on income amount by source would improve our ability to do so. This data would also be useful in helping to better understand

the drivers of wealth inequality in New Zealand, an area that we know has been a growing problem in recent decades.

12. *Age of dwelling.* We recommend collecting data on age of dwelling. For dwellings built prior to 1990, LIM reports may be a useful source for this data. New Zealand has an ageing housing stock that requires significant upgrading in many regions of the country. On its own, dwelling age is of course insufficient to guide such decisions – for example, it does not account for improvements that may have been made to an older structure, extending its lifespan. But taken together with other data on, for example, dwelling coldness and damp, or the average income of a region, it should assist in monitoring the general quality of the housing stock and guiding urban planning and infrastructure investment decisions to upgrade/renew the housing stock.
13. *Dwelling coldness.* We recommend collecting data, via the annual survey, on dwelling coldness. We know that housing quality is a major social determinant of health, and that New Zealand has a chronic problem with dwelling dampness (hence the prevalence of developing-world diseases such as rheumatic fever). As noted in the consultation document, data is already collected on access to basic amenities and dwelling dampness and mould. This data provides important insights into the condition of housing across different parts of the country, which is useful for policymakers in determining where action is needed to improve the housing stock – for example, through insulation retrofitting programmes. Getting a better picture of housing warmth would provide further insight into this issue, particularly in the context of New Zealand’s very high energy prices, and the prevalence of energy poverty among certain cohorts.
14. The NZCTU thanks Statistics New Zealand for the opportunity to comment on this work.

For further information, please contact

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