

Briefing to the Incoming Minister of Statistics
1 February 2023



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Foreword from Mark Sowden

It is my pleasure to welcome you as Minister for Statistics and I look forward to working with you in this portfolio. As Minister for Statistics you have significant opportunities to improve the way data is collected, managed and used across the motu to improve the lives of New Zealanders today, and for generations to come.

At Tatauranga Aotearoa Stats NZ, our goal is to create a thriving data system that benefits us all. Data is increasingly shaping our decisions, our interactions with businesses and government and our progress as a small trading nation far from international markets. New data-driven industries are emerging and to enable them to flourish it is paramount that New Zealanders have information they can trust. As Minister for Statistics, you have opportunities to create this trusted data environment.

As Aotearoa New Zealand's national statistical agency, our environment is continuously evolving and our customers' needs are evolving with it. We are constantly working to be more adaptable and innovative in how we gather, analyse, and present data. This involves forging new partnerships and finding new ways of working. This will empower our customers to make evidence-based decisions with timely, relevant data.

You take over this portfolio at a very exciting and challenging time for us. The National Census will be held on Tuesday, 7 March 2023. The five-yearly official count of population and dwellings gives the most complete picture of life in our country and will inform the decisions your colleagues make across government. This work extends well beyond Census Day, as our statisticians analyse and update all our datasets.

Of course, the vital day-to-day work of Stats NZ continues as well, with daily data releases informing New Zealanders about their communities. We do face global post-COVID-19 collection challenges, and we are adapting our practices to cope with a global trend of lowering response rates. Underpinned by the refreshed Data and Statistics Act (2022), we are creating more opportunities for administrative data to improve, verify and create efficiencies in our statistical production.

In our strategic intentions document published in 2021 we set out four strategic priorities that will guide our work:

- a more integrated and inclusive government data system;
- more relevant and timely data and statistics;
- more data and better data for and about Māori; and
- less reliance on direct contact with New Zealanders to gather data.

In essence Minister, we are aiming to leverage existing data more effectively to move ourselves up the measurement value chain. We will plan and execute our work along strategic lines, act in an open and upfront manner, undertake more extensive and meaningful engagement with our customers and stakeholders, build partnerships and trust, promote sound leadership, and give staff every opportunity to perform to their highest potential.

I warmly welcome you to this portfolio and look forward to working with you closely.

Ngā mihi nui



Mark Sowden

Government Statistician and Chief Executive – Stats NZ

Overview of Statistics Portfolio

Your Ministerial Responsibilities

As Minister for Statistics you have ministerial oversight of Stats NZ, the agency with primary responsibility for providing New Zealand's official statistics and the leader of the government data system. As a National Statistical Office, Stats NZ collects information from people and organisations through censuses, surveys, and administrative data. Using the information collected through these, we produce statistics, data, advice, insights, and expertise to our customers – including decision-makers and the public.

High quality statistics and data are a valuable national asset. You have a key role in championing the use of data as a strategic asset among your Ministerial colleagues, promoting how better use of data will support a range of the Government's priorities, and advocating for the use of data to better understand New Zealand and to drive service delivery.

More broadly, there is an opportunity to build a high performing data system across the whole of government. The government holds a vast amount of data on behalf of New Zealanders and it has significant potential to be a valuable asset through driving innovation and contributing to economic and social progress, and making a difference for iwi-Māori.

Stats NZ is also the functional leader of the government data system, which is formalised through the Government Chief Data Steward mandate. Therefore the Stats portfolio has a role as the leaders of New Zealand's data system and leading the Government response to new and emerging data issues, promoting best practice and safe innovation. It involves working with Māori, Tagata Moana, community groups, businesses, and local and central government. We help others do new things with data and assist them to maintain integrity and privacy standards.

As the Minister of Statistics, you also have the mandate to influence and direct conversations and decisions that will have an impact on the everyday lives of New Zealanders, including the use of automated decision making and algorithms, offshore cloud services, and other aspects of the emerging digital economy.

Under the Data and Statistics Act 2022, the Minister of Statistics has the functions and powers to:

- specify the Government's data and statistical priorities;
- approve the multi-year data and statistical programme required by the Act;
- approve joint collection agreements;
- approve mandatory requests for data to individuals, public sector agencies, and/or organisations by the Government Statistician through Stats NZ or another authorised public sector agency; and
- direct the Government Statistician to produce or cease production of statistics of any kind.

Associate Minister Delegations

From 2020 to 2022 the Associate Minister of Statistics had the following delegations, which will need to be reassessed or reconfirmed pending your preferences:

- The Mana Ōrite Relationship Agreement and the agreed work programme, including the development of a Māori Data Governance Model.
- Ministerial oversight of the Iwi-led data collection for 2023 Census.

- Engagement with iwi and Māori groups, including the relationship with the Data Iwi Leaders Group (as detailed in the Mana Ōrite Relationship Agreement), and other relevant iwi, iwi-related groups, and key Māori data partners.
- Ministerial oversight of current and future initiatives within the Stats NZ work programme that are primarily focused on delivering improved outcomes for iwi and Māori.
- Replying to Ministerial correspondence and Parliamentary Questions on issues relating to the above.

The previous Minister of Statistics retained all financial and statutory responsibilities, and was kept informed of all significant issues or policy decisions.

Challenges and Opportunities

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted and continues to impact almost all aspects of daily life. Corresponding shifts across New Zealand’s economy and society are being observed at both the national and regional level. These shifts are posing new challenges for data collection and exacerbating known risks associated with traditional collection strategies and methods of measurement.

Key challenges for Stats NZ’s ongoing work programme include:

- Responding to changes in expectations about how the public engage with the public service. Stats NZ has a large household survey programme and our field-based data collection specialists are encountering increasing hostility toward data collection, especially when it involves being in private dwellings.
- Adapting to meet increased and changing demand for data and statistics.
- Tight labour market conditions resulting in high turnover, recruitment challenges and resource constraints, particularly in our operational workforce (data collection specialists).
- Flashpoints of declining trust in government where pockets of the general public have a heightened sensitivity to government presence and activity, the nature of the data being collected, and how data is being collected.
- Increasingly mobile individuals and households and a heightened awareness of illness, are also increasing Stats NZ’s ability to establish contact with participants and meet target response rates.

These challenges are not unique to New Zealand’s context, with many National Statistical Offices across the globe – including Stats NZ’s counterparts in Europe, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada – also finding it increasingly difficult to execute successful data collection through traditional methods. Stats NZ is having to work through these challenges to continue delivering its core products and services and has worked closely with customers to ensure any changes in sources and methods, or uncertainties about data quality, are clear and, where possible, are signalled in advance.

We are countering these challenges by investing in new methods of data collection, including virtual interviewing and greater use of administrative data. These new collections methods are requiring us to re-invest in the people capability, processes and technology required for a modern statistical organisation. We are moving in lockstep with the international statistical community to learn what works, what does not work, and what is promising.

You also have many opportunities to improve the functioning of the wider data and statistical system, including:

- Working in partnership with iwi and Māori to create a data system that delivers more relevant, timely and accessible data for iwi, hapū and whānau.
- Refocusing the system so that it is inclusive and meeting the diverse needs of our customers including the LGBTQI+ community, disabled peoples, and Tagata Moana. Government has a role in ensuring that people can see themselves in the data and ensuring our insights reflect their diversity.
- Strengthening the Government's use of data across portfolios to support research, policy analysis and service delivery. This requires a lift in capability across government agencies, enabling interoperability across agencies and investment in key data system assets.
- Maintaining public trust and confidence in the Government's use of data and uptake of technology. There is an opportunity to improve ethical data practice across government, ensure privacy is maintained and improve transparency to the public in what we do.
- Harnessing the potential of data driven innovation in New Zealand. There may also be an opportunity to look beyond Government and help improve the way data is used in a way that drives economic growth, enables inclusion, leads to improvement in social well-being and responds to environmental pressures.

We will meet with you early on to discuss challenges and opportunities in more detail, and to learn more about your priorities for your term as Minister of Statistics. In particular, we want to know how Stats NZ can support you in your new role, and the wider Government in delivering on its priorities.

How we support and engage with you

Getting you the high-quality advice you need

Stats NZ is a government department with approximately 1,500 employees. We have staff at offices in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch as well as local data collection specialists across New Zealand. Stats NZ officials are always on hand to support you in your duties as Minister of Statistics. This support takes several forms:

- **Regular meeting with Stats NZ officials:** We recommend that you meet with Stats NZ officials fortnightly for 45 minutes, with a standing agenda including a short one-on-one with the Government Statistician / Chief Executive, an update on Census, and any other business as required. However, we will work with your office to arrange timing, regularity, and content of the regular meeting with Stats NZ officials based on your preference.
- **Weekly report:** Currently we provide a weekly report that includes regular updates on high priority items, ad-hoc updates on different parts of the work programme as they progress, a list of upcoming releases, and a details of departmental Official Information Act requests or Cabinet Papers and Bills received for departmental consultation that may be of interest.
- **Topic-specific briefings and reports:** Separate briefings and reports will be provided to you as and when Stats NZ needs to update you on aspects of our work or seek your agreement on a certain course of action. Stats NZ officials, including your Private Secretary, will also support you in any engagements you undertake in relation to the Statistics portfolio – providing talking points and information on related subjects, and supporting you in person where appropriate.

- **Ad-hoc meetings on request:** Stats NZ officials, including our Chief Executive and Executive Leadership Team, will be available to meet with you on request.
- **Private Secretary (Statistics):** The Private Secretary for Statistics is based in your office and serves as the primary liaison between your office and Stats NZ. They are there to ensure your interests and concerns are fully understood and appreciated by officials, and in turn that Stats NZ's position and advice is properly articulated to you and your office. You can use the Private Secretary as a means of communicating your needs and preferences about how you would like information presented to you.
- **Statistical Releases:** Most of Stats NZ's statistical releases are made public to all New Zealanders at the same time. However, some releases may be available to select stakeholders in advance of the public release under embargoed conditions set under the Data and Statistics Act 2022. The Private Secretary for Statistics will ensure that your office is aware when significant and topical releases are happening and when information is being made available under embargo conditions.

Role of the Government Statistician

The role of Government Statistician is a vital and unique part of your Ministerial Portfolio. This role is held by Mark Sowden who is also the Chief Executive of Stats NZ. The Minister of Statistics and the Government Statistician have complementary roles in the production of official statistics.

As Minister of Statistics you will specify the "what" and the Government Statistician is responsible for the "how" and "when". This division of roles is set out in the Data and Statistics Act 2022. It ensures that you can measure the things that are important to advancing the Government's priorities, while the methods for producing official statistics and the timing of their release are free from political interference. This political neutrality is at the forefront of the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and is critical for maintaining public trust and confidence in the integrity of official statistics.

Role of the Government Chief Data Steward

Recognising data as a key enabler for effective service delivery, in 2022 the Public Service Commissioner formally nominated the Chief Executive of Stats NZ as the Government Chief Data Steward. This is a legislated System Lead role under the Public Service Act 2020. Other system leads include Digital, Information Security, Procurement and Property.

Under the joint leadership of you as Minister of Statistics and the Government Chief Data Steward, we believe New Zealand's data system can be among the most effective and responsive in the world. If we are able to get the settings right, data will be used to drive new insight into the needs of the population, inform policy decisions, and be used to evaluate the effectiveness of Government policy.

Stats NZ leads the data system by facilitating and enabling a joined-up approach to data-related opportunities and challenges. The Government Chief Data Steward aims to support agencies to maximise the potential of data and ensure data is used effectively while maintaining the trust and confidence of New Zealanders.

To do this, the Government Chief Data Steward has five clear areas of focus:

- investment in new data systems and maintenance of current systems;
- building data capability across government agencies and beyond;
- enabling effective data access and sharing by embedding common data standards;
- supporting the data system to deliver for, and with, Māori; and

- fostering trust and ethics in the way data is managed and used.

Our Organisational Strategy

As our environment changes and our customers' needs evolve, our strategy guides us towards our long-term objective of providing relevant and reliable statistics.

Our strategy is a framework to push the boundaries and identify meaningful opportunities to respond to the needs and opportunities of the current times. We have had ambitious work plans and our efforts over the last 12 months have led to refinement and prioritisation against our strategy. By embedding our strategy, we have built strong foundations across our four strategic priorities set out below.

1. Priority 1 – Proactively improve the health of the data system of Aotearoa

Stats NZ is the functional leader of the government data system, which is formalised through the Government Chief Data Steward mandate. As functional lead, Stats NZ is responsible for constantly monitoring the system and leading the implementation of a plan to improve its health, effectiveness, and status over time. In five years, we will have mechanisms in place to understand the strengths and vulnerabilities of the system as a whole, to identify and pursue key gaps in data sets and to better understand the data maturity of all agencies that make up the system. Pursuing the shifts needed to realise the benefits of this system will require a strengthened, high-trust data environment, and our approach will focus on relationship-building, standardisation, and best ethical practices.

2. Priority 2 – Measure what matters and proactively manage risk around core systems

To ensure Stats NZ is delivering for the benefit of Aotearoa, we will proactively identify key areas of public interest and how these change over time to ensure we are ready to measure what matters, when it matters. As part of this priority, we will look carefully at our core systems and their capabilities. With future data-needs in mind, we will identify a clear understanding of what technology we will patch-up and what we need to replace or upgrade. We will create an informed legacy management timeline and plan, which links with an investment plan, to retire technology that is no longer useful and be clear on what systems we need to keep running until better technology becomes accessible.

3. Priority 3 – Deliver for and with Māori, iwi, and hapū

Stats NZ is committed to building enduring relationships and developing the infrastructure, capabilities and resources required to work with Māori data appropriately as part of our core business. In 2019, the Mana Ōrite Relationship Agreement was signed between Stats NZ and the Data Iwi Leaders Group of the National Iwi Chairs Forum. The purpose of the relationship is to work together with iwi-Māori to realise the potential of data to make a sustainable, positive difference to outcomes for iwi, hapū, and whānau. To centre Māori needs and aspirations, we are committed to working in partnership and establishing governance models that grow capacity and enable self-determination regarding the collection, ownership, meaning and application of Māori data. This commitment will require an openness to different perspectives, an informed understanding of what long-term intergenerational wellbeing looks like for Māori and a clear vision for how data can best support the realisation of that future.

4. Priority 4 – Become an organisation that uses administrative data first

Administrative data is information (like home address or tax returns) which is routinely collected by agencies for the purposes of running their operations. Administrative data is a valuable and

low cost source of input for statistical insights. Stats NZ is aiming to become an administrative data first organisation, and will work to ensure key infrastructure requirements, resources, system assets and a completed set of registers are in place to make this transition.

This will mean that existing data increases in efficiency, value and potential, and we will be able to focus our resources on areas that need support to ensure that all official data is representative and reflective of Aotearoa. This priority links closely with our aspirations for the data system. To build a robust foundation for working with administrative data, the way we work with all data providers must be collaborative and effective.

Our Executive Leadership Team



Mark Sowden - Government Statistician, Government Chief Data Steward, and Chief Executive of Stats NZ

The different roles and functions of the Government Statistician, Government Chief Data Steward, and Chief Executive of Stats NZ are set out in the section “how we support and engage with you” above.



Rachael Milicich - Deputy Government Statistician and Deputy Chief Executive for Insights and Statistics

The Insights and Statistics branch curates, shapes, and enriches data to provide reliable and relevant insights and statistics on New Zealand's economy, population, society, and environment.



Craig Jones - Deputy Government Statistician and Deputy Chief Executive for Data System Leadership

The Data System Leadership branch helps New Zealand get value from data, provides leadership to the government data system, and delivers the foundations for an enduring and effective data system.



Simon Mason - Deputy Government Statistician and Deputy Chief Executive for Census and Collection Operations

The Census and Collection Operations branch is responsible for running the census and collecting data from households and businesses for the production of statistics.



Fiona Hewitt – Deputy Government Statistician and Deputy Chief Executive for Strategy, People & Resources

The Strategy, People & Resources branch enables Stats NZ to focus and position itself for ongoing success through effective, joined-up functions, effective governance, investment decision-making, strategy and planning, cultural change, leadership and people capability across the organisation.



Emma Jones – Deputy Government Statistician and Deputy Chief Executive for Organisation Infrastructure

Organisation Infrastructure is responsible for organisational technology and infrastructure (including corporate offices and procurement) activities. The group also leads in the areas of continuous improvement, along with opportunities for alignment, integration, and economies of scale across Stats NZ's activities.



Tia Warbrick - Deputy Chief Executive, Māori Partnerships and Strategy

Tia leads Te Tohu Rautaki Angitū Māori, the branch of Stats NZ that advocates for and champions the data needs and interests of our Tiriti partner to ensure our meaningful engagement in the Māori-Crown relationship – ultimately to deliver far greater outcomes for Māori through data so that Māori can thrive.



Rhonda Paku - Kaihautū

The Kaihautū will lead a new function that will support Stats NZ to raise the individual and collective capability of its workforce in a rapidly evolving environment to support its relationships with iwi-Māori and support Māori aspirations for mana motuhakea.



Vince Galvin - Chief Methodologist, Head of Statistical Methods and Design

The Statistical Methods and Design Branch provides methodological leadership and technical support to Stats NZ and the wider statistical and data community.

Areas of attention for early action

Below we have provided a summary and background information on some areas of the work programme that will need your early attention. Please note that this is intended to facilitate an initial conversation and we will provide further information on each of these items as work progresses.

2023 Census

Stats NZ is ready to deliver a successful 2023 Census on 7 March. Data collection for the 2023 Census will run between 13 February and April 2023, with Census Day scheduled to take place in the middle of this period on Tuesday, 7 March 2023.

The design of the 2023 Census has been informed by the lessons from the 2018 Census: taking what worked well in 2018 and targeting the elements that did not work well. The 2023 Census will deliver to a larger, more diverse, and changing population than previous censuses and has been designed to do exactly this. We are doing some things differently in 2023 to make it easier for people to be counted in the census – including providing more choice in how people complete their census forms and more help for those who need it. People will have the choice of completing their census forms either online or on paper. Key components of the design of the 2023 Census include more paper forms, more in-person support, new ways of engaging with high priority populations, and planned use of administrative data to fill information gaps where appropriate.


Stats NZ is working across a range of technical, operational, and assurance activities. These include work to ensure data collection methods and processes are reliable, technological solutions are fit-for-purpose, census staff and communities are prepared, and service supports are delivered effectively.

The context in which the 2023 Census will be delivered is unlike that of previous census operations. This is the first census to follow the 2018 Census, which failed to meet the needs of some members of the community, in particular our Treaty partners. In addition, we're navigating uncertainty related to COVID-19, changing public sentiment towards engaging with government activities and processes, and a competitive and tight labour market. The heavy dependency on the external environment and attitude of the general public makes the programme high risk.

A successful census relies on high levels of public engagement translating into high-level of response from right across the country. The higher the number of census responses received, both in total and across different geographic areas and population groups, will ensure delivery of higher-quality information about Aotearoa, for Aotearoa. While the design of the 2023 Census sets us up well, and contingencies are in place to navigate and respond to anticipated challenges, some shifts in context could require additional response – above and beyond that already planned in order to safeguard the number and quality of responses to the census.

One way Stats NZ can respond to changes in context, or unforeseen events impacting the level of response to the census is to extend the period of data collection in areas at risk of low response rates. However, if we need to extend the collection period this will require additional funding.

s9(2)(f)(iv)



Action required from you:

s9(2)(f)(iv)

2. Provide public support and promotion on the importance of the census and peoples participation in it, including encouragement of colleagues to do the same. This is particularly applicable around and on census day, 7 March 2023.
3. Prioritise availability to support any key census incidents, especially around the week of census.

Child Poverty Statistics

Under the Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018, Stats NZ has responsibility for annual reporting on the number and percentage of children living in poverty and how this changes over time. These statistics receive widespread attention in the media and are used to assess whether the Government has met targets to reduce the number of children living in poverty.

Since 2018, these statistics have been produced using a combination of administrative data and data collected through the Household Economic Survey. There is currently a work programme underway to decommission the Household Economic Survey, replacing it with a new longitudinal survey called *Living in Aotearoa*. This shift is required to meet a requirement for Stats NZ to report on persistent child poverty under the Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018.

You will receive quarterly updates on Child Poverty Statistics, which are also provided to the Minister of Finance and the Minister for Child Poverty Reduction. You will also receive regular short updates in the weekly report and ad hoc briefings on this topic as and when required.

Child Poverty Statistics for 2021/22 will be published on 23 March 2023. Data collection of the 2021/22 HES was significantly impacted by COVID-19 alert level restrictions, lockdowns, and other disruptions, resulting in an achieved a sample size of approximately 9,000 households, compared to the targeted 20,000 households as designed. While sufficient to produce official statistics, the reduced sample size means that statistics will be subject to higher sample error, data quality caveats, and a reduction in the level of detailed breakdowns published.

Action required from you: Note Child Poverty Statistics for 2021/22 will be published on 23 March 2023. This will be a highly topical release with the potential for critical commentary. We will meet with you and provide you more detailed information on this topic before then.

Māori Data Governance

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Budget 2023

s9(2)(f)(iv)

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s9(2)(f)(iv)

Data Ethics

The Minister for Digital Economy and Communication released a Digital Strategy for Aotearoa in 2022. The strategy sets out the goal for Aotearoa New Zealand to have world-leading systems that are internationally recognised for being trusted and ethical. Establishment of a Centre for Data Ethics is referenced in the [Digital Strategy for Aotearoa - Action Plan](#) as one potential mechanism to create the trust settings required for digital industries to thrive in New Zealand.

s9(2)(f)(iv)

Other upcoming matters

Ministerial Approval of Surveys – Post-Enumeration Survey

Under section 11 of the Data and Statistics Act 2022, the Minister of Statistics has a number of functions and powers. This includes the function to approve certain requests for data under section 28(3). You will be receiving a briefing in early February seeking your formal approval to undertake the Post-Enumeration Survey (Census Coverage assessment), which is a mandatory request for data under section 23 of the Data and Statistics Act 2022.

You will be receiving a briefing on this item in early February. This is a critical and time-sensitive matter and we will work with your office to arrange a time to discuss this briefing with you, if required. This briefing will set out background information about the purpose and design of the Post-Enumeration Survey, why it is important, as well as parameters of the request, and as such, the extent of your approval, if granted.

s9(2)(f)(iv)

Government Chief Data Steward Mandate

The Government Chief Data Steward's (GCDS) role was established in 2017 with the aim of establishing a common approach to the collection, management, and use of data across government. The role was formally established as a System Lead under the Public Service Act 2020 through a Cabinet decision in 2022.

The current mandate for the GCDS includes all public service agencies as defined in the Public Service Act 2020, as well as non-public service departments: the NZ Police, NZ Defence Force, and Parliamentary Counsel Office. Crown Agents, as defined in Schedule 1, are not mandated to apply the tools and levers developed by the Government Chief Data Steward mandate and instead they will be encouraged to adopt them.

The Minister of Statistics directed Stats NZ to work with Treasury and Public Service Commission, as well as departmental monitoring agencies, to consider whether the development of a Notice of Direction under Section 107 of the Crown Entities Act is warranted to compel Crown Agents to comply with any Government Chief Data Steward directives (Gov-22-MIN-0056 refers). Stats NZ will brief you on work underway.

Public Consultation on 'Measuring an Inclusive and Sustainable Economy'

In February 2023, Stats NZ will be consulting on measuring an inclusive and sustainable economy by looking at potential data improvements, the opportunities from adopting the new international standards, and the datasets that we will potentially need to source and adapt to support these standards. This consultation will also allow us to understand the current and future needs of our customers and what their priorities are.