

Aide memoire to the Minister of Statistics: 2018 Census Content Decisions

Public Release: 2018 Census Content Decisions

Date: 31 July 2017, 2pm

Background

1. On Monday 31 July 2017, the Government Statistician will announce the 2018 Census content decisions.
2. Like all Stats NZ survey content, the decision is made by the Government Statistician following consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders.
3. The announcement will involve the release of the final content report on the stats.govt.nz website and a media statement at 2pm (copies attached).
4. The focus for the 2018 Census programme has been to maintain and improve the relevance of content, to help gather robust, independent information that can inform decision making.
5. We have assessed the range of information we collect, and, for the first time since 2001 will be introducing new topics and making changes to existing topics. The aim of the changes we have made is to improve the relevance and quality of the information collected, while balancing the need to preserve data comparability over time.

Key Content Decisions and Context

6. A number of potential new topics were researched, developed and tested. These included:

Topic	Decision to include in the 2018 Census	Decision to exclude from the 2018 Census	Decision to collect via another method or Stats NZ survey
Housing quality – dampness and mould indicator and access to basic amenities	▲		
Educational address and travel to education	▲		
Intersex addition to the current biological sex question			▲
Sexual orientation			▲
Gender identity		▲	
Step families		▲	

New set of questions about disability also known as activity limitation	▲		
Licence to occupy		▲	
Ownership of other dwellings		▲	
Second address/residence		▲	

7. Following testing (see detail below), we were unable to guarantee the quality of the information that we could gather via a self-completed survey like the census for topics including sexual orientation, gender and a third category for sex.
8. We are now planning to include sexual orientation as a topic in our 2018 General Social Survey (New Zealand's biggest survey of well-being) starting with public testing in September. This approach will provide a better platform for gathering information on sexual orientation and will provide us with valuable insights about collecting this topic in other surveys in the future.
9. We also tested whether we could collect information from those who are biologically intersex, as we know that they are unable to accurately represent their biological sex with a two-category question (male / female).
10. The decision to not include a third category for the sex topic reflects the challenge that statistical agencies all over the world are facing, where providing an alternative to a binary sex question (male / female) is proving difficult to design, given the need to guarantee the quality and comparability of the information captured. To date, no agency has introduced a third option for biological sex in their census.
11. Stats NZ is developing an alternative way to capture intersex population information in the 2018 Census and will work with representative groups in the lead up to the census to ensure the intersex population of New Zealand is able to answer this question accurately. At a minimum this will involve providing those who wish to identify as intersex with a paper form on which they can mark both 'male' and 'female'.

Decision criteria and consultation approach

12. During content development we considered criteria that included:
 - Does the proposed change add value to New Zealand's society and economy?
 - Is the census the most appropriate information source?
 - Does the proposed change reflect an enduring information need?
 - Will the proposed change produce quality information?
 - Is there continuity with previous census data?
 - Is data consistent with other data collections?
 - Is there general acceptance of the proposed change?
 - Would the proposed questions be easy for respondents to complete?
13. 2018 Census content development started in mid-2015 and included public engagement, formal submissions and specific engagements with central government and key agencies.
 - 226 people signed up to an online engagement platform. They posted 1,079 comments. Over 120 members of the public attended workshops and seminars across five cities.

- 176 individuals and organisations submitted formal submissions. There was representation from central government, local government, non-government organisations, interest groups, academics, researchers, health boards, and individuals.

Testing programme

14. Rigorous testing has been conducted to ensure that content is fit for purpose and will enable everyone in New Zealand to participate in the census, either online, or by paper.
15. Public facing census testing began in March 2016. 22,000 households in Auckland, Waikato, Wellington, and Canterbury were invited to participate in the first census test. The overall response rate for the test, following field follow up, was 59 percent. 65 percent of households took part using an early version of our online form.
16. A second test was held in July 2016, where questionnaire content, and a further test of the online and paper forms, was the focus.
17. In April 2017, 19,000 households in Whanganui were asked to participate in the third public facing census test. Despite a state of emergency being called in Whanganui on the day of the test, due to the threat of flooding, the test still had a self-response rate of 36 percent, with 76 percent of participants taking part using the online form. This test did not involve any field follow up.

Next steps

18. The content report will be sent by your office to the offices of the Ministers of Health, Building & Housing, Education, Transport, Social Development, Disability Issues, and DPMC, for their information as potentially interested parties.
19. A series of workshops will run from Tuesday 1 August around the country to brief expert data users on the detail behind the content decisions.
20. Officials will also follow up with key stakeholders and representative groups on topics such as how we will count the intersex population of New Zealand, and will be available to respond to questions.
21. An official will be available to brief you by phone or in person on Monday afternoon, should you wish to talk through any of the content decisions in more detail.