

SELECT COMMITTEE ORAL SUBMISSION

Data and Statistics (Census) Amendment Bill 2026

WeCreate

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1. Introduction

Tēnā koutou katoa.

Ko Paula Browning toku ingoa. I am the Executive Director of WeCreate,

WeCreate is the alliance of New Zealand's creative industry associations and creative organisations — representing over 30,000 Kiwi creators and creative businesses, across all creative industries from games to music to screen to publishing, fashion, architecture, advertising, design, performing and visual arts. We note that the creative sector is highly digital in how the products and services we make and sell are created, marketed, distributed and consumed.

We are here today because this Bill matters — not just to government and statisticians, but to every creative professional in this country whose work and value is currently mostly invisible to government data systems.

WeCreate has engaged with the New Zealand government data system for over a decade. We commissioned NZIER to produce the first comprehensive valuation of the creative sector in 2016 because government data could not tell that story. In 2026 it still cannot tell it accurately.

As it currently operates, the data system does not see us, and without deliberate intervention, this Bill will lock in and magnify that invisibility.

2. What Is at Stake

The creative industries are not a niche concern for the data system. The Ministry for Culture and Heritage reports that the sector contributed \$18.5b to GDP in 2025 and employed 122,000 New Zealanders – 4.4% of the total workforce. Creative sectors are defined by UNCTAD and many advanced economies as high-value economic contributors.

In Aotearoa New Zealand the Cabinet-approved *Amplify Creative and Cultural Strategy* sets out an evidence framework as a core government commitment and deliverable under the Strategy. That commitment cannot be delivered if the underlying data infrastructure is broken.

The data system used by Infometrics to produce data for MCH continues to draw from data systems that do not accurately reflect creative sector industries and occupations as they exist today and have no mechanism for keeping pace with technology change.

If we transition to an admin-data-first census model without fixing the foundations of the existing system, we will entrench what is already broken.

3. Why the Creative Sector Is a "Harder-to-Measure Community"

The Bill's Regulatory Impact Statement acknowledges that certain communities will be harder to measure under the new model and may require tailored solutions. The creative sector meets this definition in every respect. Let me be specific about why.

The freelance and portfolio work reality

The creative sector has double the number of freelancers and contractors of any other sector in the economy. Our workforce is characterised by multi-occupation, project-based, and gig-structured employment. Admin data systems — built around the employer-employee model — are structurally ill-equipped to capture this reality.

Most of government policy — including in education and vocational training — is still predicated on an employment model that is simply outdated for our sector. That must change, and the census is the place to begin fixing it.

The IRD single-occupation limitation

IRD systems currently allow only a single occupation to be reported. For a sound engineer who also teaches, composes, and earns royalties from a streaming platform, that single field is not just incomplete — it is misleading. If IRD data becomes a pillar of the new census model, these gaps become structural features, not temporary limitations.

The classification code problem — still unresolved

The ANZSIC and ANZSOC codes must be updated to reflect the realities of the modern and evolving creative and digital economy. The census transition should not proceed without addressing these gaps.

Digital industries and the rear-view mirror problem

Every industry in our membership is digital - yet existing data systems do not capture the breadth or depth of value created by digital creative work. The new census model must build in live mechanisms to capture emerging digital industries and occupations on an ongoing basis — not simply take a snapshot of where the economy was at the last classification review.

4. The Investment and Infrastructure Gap

We want to be direct with the Committee about something that underlies all of this.

The Minister's announcement framed this Bill primarily around cost reduction. WeCreate's concern is that building a new census model on admin data that already misrepresents and under-represents the creative sector — and doing so to save money — is a false economy. We are sceptical that data of sufficient quality and accuracy sits in government agencies, and that it can be extracted into the data system using resources within agency's existing budget lines.

Data is an economic asset. Its value is seen most clearly in Big Tech and artificial intelligence companies, where vast volumes of data underpin revenue at scale. The New Zealand government has not sufficiently prioritised or invested in data systems — particularly in the past three decades, as technology change made better data capture more feasible, not less.

We have seen what a deliberate, resourced approach to data can deliver. When Toi Mai — the Workforce Development Council for the creative, cultural, tech and recreation sectors — was established, it invested in a dedicated data and insights team. That team embedded data-thinking at the start of every project. In many cases, data and insights were captured that would otherwise not have existed and were subsequently useful well beyond their original purpose.

That is the level of intentionality — and investment — that is needed across government if the outcomes this Bill sets out are to be achieved.

5. What We Are Asking the Committee to Do

WeCreate is not asking the Committee to reject this Bill. We support the principle of more frequent, responsive data. Annual publication from 2030 is something the creative sector genuinely needs.

What we are asking is that the Committee use this Bill to create the conditions for the creative sector's data to improve — not deteriorate — through the transition. Specifically, we ask the Committee to make 5 recommendations:

1. **That Stats NZ formally designate the creative sector as a harder-to-measure community** requiring tailored data collection solutions, and that this designation be written into the transition planning, not left to discretion.
2. **That the outstanding classification issues — ANZSIC and ANZSOC — be resolved before the 2030 Census transitions.**
3. **That WeCreate's Data and Insights Working Group be formally recognised as a co-design partner** in the design of the Census Attribute Survey — particularly in relation to creative sector occupations, industries, and income structures.
4. **That the single-occupation limitation in IRD admin data be addressed** as part of the cross-government admin data improvement programme.
5. **That Stats NZ be required to track and publicly report on creative sector data quality** as part of the periodic review obligations under the amended Act.

6. Closing

The creative sector is one of Aotearoa's most dynamic economic contributors — and one of its least visible in official data. We have been making this point to government for over a decade.

This Bill is an opportunity to finally close that gap — or to lock it in for another generation. We are asking this Committee to choose the former.

We are grateful for the opportunity to present today and welcome your questions.