

SUBMISSION
Data & Statistics (Census) Amendment Bill 2026

BACKGROUND

WeCreate is the alliance comprising forty of Aotearoa’s major creative industry associations and organisations (representing 30,000+ Kiwi creators, support people, and creative businesses), which was founded in 2014 to propel growth in the sector and increase its contribution to New Zealand’s social and economic wellbeing.

In 2016 WeCreate commissioned NZIER to produce a valuation of the creative sector which estimated its **contribution to GDP at \$17.5bn and employment at 131,000 people** – one third of whom work outside the creative industries. The following quote, taken from the NZIER Report, summarises our experience in relation to data and statistics about our sector in New Zealand:

Existing definitions and methods of measuring the economic impact of creativity in New Zealand do not take full account of the sector’s dynamic, rapidly changing nature. Better data will allow everyone with a stake in the creative sector to better understand the scope and scale of the sector and its current and potential contribution to the economy and our well-being.

WeCreate needed the NZIER report to be able to start a conversation with government about our sector. In developing the NZIER report, we made a comprehensive assessment of the data system, including the ANZSIC and ANZSOC codes, as they relate to creative activity in New Zealand. At this time the government had never produced its own data and statistics on the whole creative sector. In 2021 Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage commenced publication of [sector profiles](#) (produced by Infometrics). MCH notes that:

“Having economic data, such as GDP, employment, and business information, is not only important for demonstrating the economic context of these sectors but is also an essential puzzle piece for our understanding of the wide value of these sectors.”

We acknowledge the commitment and investment MCH makes into these reports, however they continue to draw from data systems that do not accurately reflect industry and occupations as they exist in New Zealand, and do not have a mechanism for keeping pace with technology development and adoption.

The comments made here reflect WeCreate’s experience over the past decade in compiling our own data about our sector, working with our members to understand how each creative industry compiles its own data, as well as – more recently – establishing a Creative Industries Data & Insights Working Group (comprising representatives from MCH Manatū Taonga, MBIE, StatsNZ, Te Puni Kōkiri, NZ Story, Tātaki Auckland Unlimited, Creative New Zealand, NZ on Air, NZ Film Commission and ETITC Industry Skills Board). The purpose of the Data & Insights Working Group is to provide industry guidance and connections as input for the various agency’s own data and insights work programmes, and to help reduce duplication of work effort so as to make best use of limited human and financial resources in both the sector and in government.

In the majority of our discussions with government the absence of data (or data that accurately represents the sector’s current situation) arises as a barrier. This was highlighted in 2020 during the Review of Vocational Education (RoVE) that led to the establishment of the Workforce Development Councils, and continues today across the majority of government agencies. Where traditional sectors and industries (eg manufacturing, horticulture, wine) are able to rely on data held in and by government relating to their economic contribution - including exports - workforce and other matters, the creative sector - along with tech - cannot. In the absence of accurate data, the ability of government to make informed decisions is limited.

SUBMISSION

New Zealand's creative sector is an untapped opportunity for economic and productivity growth, and could be worth \$25 billion by 2030, yet - as with other sectors that are highly digital - government data does not accurately reflect the full value, nor the current occupations and industries, that make up the NZ creative sector. Government has not fully measured this increasingly high value economic contributor, as it does others of its scale, nor as it is defined by [UNCTAD](#) and many other advanced economies.

The creative industries have been at the forefront of technology development and use for many decades. Our experience enables us to make highly informed comment on data capture and data use, both at an international level and locally. We note that the Minister's announcement of the proposed changes focussed on **cost reduction rather than data systems improvement**. In our experience of working with multiple government agencies, the resource available for data, and also – critically - insights, is already severely limited and we express our serious concerns that if the 2030 Census is built primarily on admin data that already misrepresents the creative sector, those **gaps will be locked in and magnified rather than resolved**.

Our sector needs assurance that the quality of creative sector data will improve over time, not deteriorate further as the model transitions. The RIS acknowledges that initial data quality will decline for sectors not well-represented in admin data — the creative sector is clearly in this category and **should be explicitly named in Stats NZ's mitigation planning**.

Data is an economic asset. Its value is clearly seen in the large technology companies where massive volumes of data are used to underpin revenue from advertising. We submit that **the New Zealand government has not sufficiently prioritised and invested in data systems**, particularly in the past three decades as technology developments have enabled data to be more readily captured and managed. The changes proposed in the Bill will make limited inroads to address either the under-prioritisation or under-investment in data systems. While efforts to identify, sequence, and deliver improvements to admin data are underway, without investment and resourcing of the systems and people needed to deliver this across government, there will continue to be limitations to the data government uses for decision-making.

Our sector has recent experience of the impact that an intentional and resourced approach to data can deliver. When Toi Mai, the Workforce Development Council for the creative, cultural, tech and recreation sectors was established the organisation invested in a small but effective data and insights team. The team worked across all of the organisation's work programmes to ensure that data needs were identified at the beginning of a new project, resourced, captured and delivered as part of each project. In many cases the data captured was otherwise not available but has been able to be used for purposes beyond that for which it was initially recorded. **It is this level of recognition of data value that needs to be exhibited (and invested in) across government in order to achieve the outcomes the Bill sets out.**

We draw attention to *Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand 2025–2030*. This Cabinet-approved strategy includes outcomes relating to *development of an evidence framework to provide a best practice model to collect, synthesise and report data related to the creative and cultural sectors*. Government programmes and work like this is **more costly and difficult when the core data systems are not capturing data that is accurate and timely**.

WeCreate's membership is represented by the following creative ecosystem diagram. We note that all of these industries are digital from the perspective of how their products and services are either made, marketed, distributed or consumed. Existing data systems do not capture the breadth and depth of the value created by these industries.



The creative workforce is also not readily captured by existing data systems that will be relied on under the proposed admin data approach. The sector's workforce model is dominated by freelance, gig-based, multi-occupation and project-based work which is explicitly the kind of **"harder-to-measure community" the Bill acknowledges may need tailored solutions**. The creative sector has double the number of freelancers and contractors than any other sector in the economy. With changes to work patterns, driven by technology adoption and use, part-time, gig-work and contracting will be more prevalent in the workforce in future. Working with the creative sector to understand existing models of this approach to work will assist in devising tailored solutions, including different perspectives on "employment", occupations, industries and hours worked. We note that the majority of government consultation and policy development, including in the education sector, is predicated on **the employer-employee model that is outdated in many sectors, including creative**.

Further to the matter of dominance of freelance and contractor work in our sector, we understand that one of the proposed admin data sources will be IRD data. As we understand it, IRD systems currently only allow for a single occupation to be reported. This is a data limitation for people in our sector who earn from more than one source, or occupation, or one sector. Some creative professionals earn from their intellectual property in the form of royalties, including from offshore digital platforms. We have found data on this income source difficult to source as it is not currently captured at the individual earner level.

The admin data system has not kept pace with technology-driven changes in how creative work is structured, delivered, and valued. The new census model must build in **mechanisms to capture emerging digital industries and occupations on an ongoing basis** not just reflect the economy and society through a rear-view mirror.

We submit that the proposed Census Attribute System (CAS) must use updated classification codes — not the decades-old ANZSOC and ANZSIC codes — to ensure the creative and tech workforce is properly visible. Our sector's earlier submissions on the [Future of Occupation Classification](#) (August 2024) and [Future of Industrial Classification](#) (April 2024) remain unresolved, and the census transition should not proceed without addressing those classification gaps.

Ngā mihi maioha,

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WeCreate
GROWING OUR CREATIVE SECTOR
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