



The 13th East Asian Statistical Conference

Cancellation of the 2011 Census

5-7 November 2012, Tokyo

Managing census cancellation and deferral: recent experience from New Zealand

- Background to NZ Census
- The Canterbury Earthquakes
- Cancellation Decision
- Census Wind up
- Setting a New date
- Preparing for 2013
- Lessons and Reflections

Census taking in New Zealand

- Started in 1851
- Held every 5 years except for the Great Depression and the second World War
- 7,500 Temporary staff, 100 permanent staff
- Capability largely based in Christchurch
- Census planned for March 8, 2011

The Canterbury earthquakes

- ❑ 4 September 2011, 7.1 earthquake 40km from city, followed by aftershocks
- ❑ No one was hurt, the city recovered quickly
- ❑ 22 February 2012, very shallow 6.3 earthquake close to city centre
- ❑ Immediately obvious damage was considerable
- ❑ 7000 homes needed demolition, 185 lives lost

The February 2011 earthquake and census cancellation

- One quarter of forms had already been delivered
- Severe disruption to Stats NZ facilities
- Form delivery halted in Christchurch, that evening delivery encountered resistance
- Wednesday 23 national form delivery stopped
- Initiated crisis management, pulled in expert staff to assess options

The February 2011 earthquake and census cancellation

- Most of the South Island Census function was managed from Christchurch
- Staff had lost friends and family
- National Emergency declared, public mood not supportive of continuation
- Significant (unmeasurable) movement of people out of Christchurch
- Need to make decisions quickly

The February 2011 earthquake and census cancellation

- Thursday 24 Census management team recommended to the Government Statistician to cancel the Census
- Meetings with central agency senior staff and the minister of Statistics followed later in the day
- Decision to cancel was announced on the morning of Friday Feb 25 to a generally supportive media environment
- Note the role of outside advisors

Wind-up of 2011 Census operations

- Decisions about status and payment of temporary staff
- Decisions about forms, materials, etc
- Decided to decommission process on original timeline
- IT equipment was more complicated, emergency situation was driving priorities across Stats NZ
- Our Christchurch staff had intermittent access to office facilities and often worked from home

Setting a new date

- Advice provided to cabinet initially in mid-April
- Criteria
 - Meeting Electoral requirements
 - Central and Local Government data needs
 - Wider community data needs
 - Feasibility (risk and cost)
- After some discussion March 2013 decision was made in mid-May

Preparing for the 2013 Census

- ❑ Some challenges
 - ❑ The status of contractual arrangements
 - ❑ The expectation that significant changes could be made
 - ❑ Mobile Technology has moved so quickly
- ❑ Some Advantages
 - ❑ Able to make some very useful improvements in procedures and training materials
 - ❑ Rehired some very capable temporary staff
 - ❑ Strong sense of wanting to “get the job done”

Lessons and Reflections

- Be Prepared
- Get Help (or at least perspective)
- Invest in Change Management capability
- Do we need a more “flexible” Census concept
- Know when a crisis is a disaster
- Keep the longer term in mind when recovering