Stats NZ
Tatauranga Aotearoa

Stats NZ representation review population guidelines



New Zealand Government
Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa

Crown copyright ©
See Copyright and terms of use for our copyright, attribution, and liability statements.

Citation

Stats NZ (2026). *Stats NZ representation review population guidelines*. Retrieved from https://www.lgc.govt.nz/our-work/representation-reviews/representation-review-external-resources/

ISBN 978-1-991431-49-3

Published in October 2026 by
Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa
Wellington, New Zealand

Contact
Stats NZ Information Centre: info@stats.govt.nz
Phone toll-free 0508 525 525
Phone international +64 4 931 4600

Contents

Document overview 4
Document history....4
Process flow diagram....5
About population estimates....6
Data structure....7
Charges....9
Additional resources....9
Summary....9

List of figures

Figure 1. Process for using population data for preparation of representation review 5
Figure 2: Typical examples of various supplied CSV files for processing....8

Document overview

Intended audience Users considering a representation review and wanting to understand the process for making a request for population estimates for an electoral geography.

Document purpose To provide a set of guidelines for councils to understand the process of a population data request from Stats NZ during a representation review.

Feedback This is a living document and feedback is welcome.

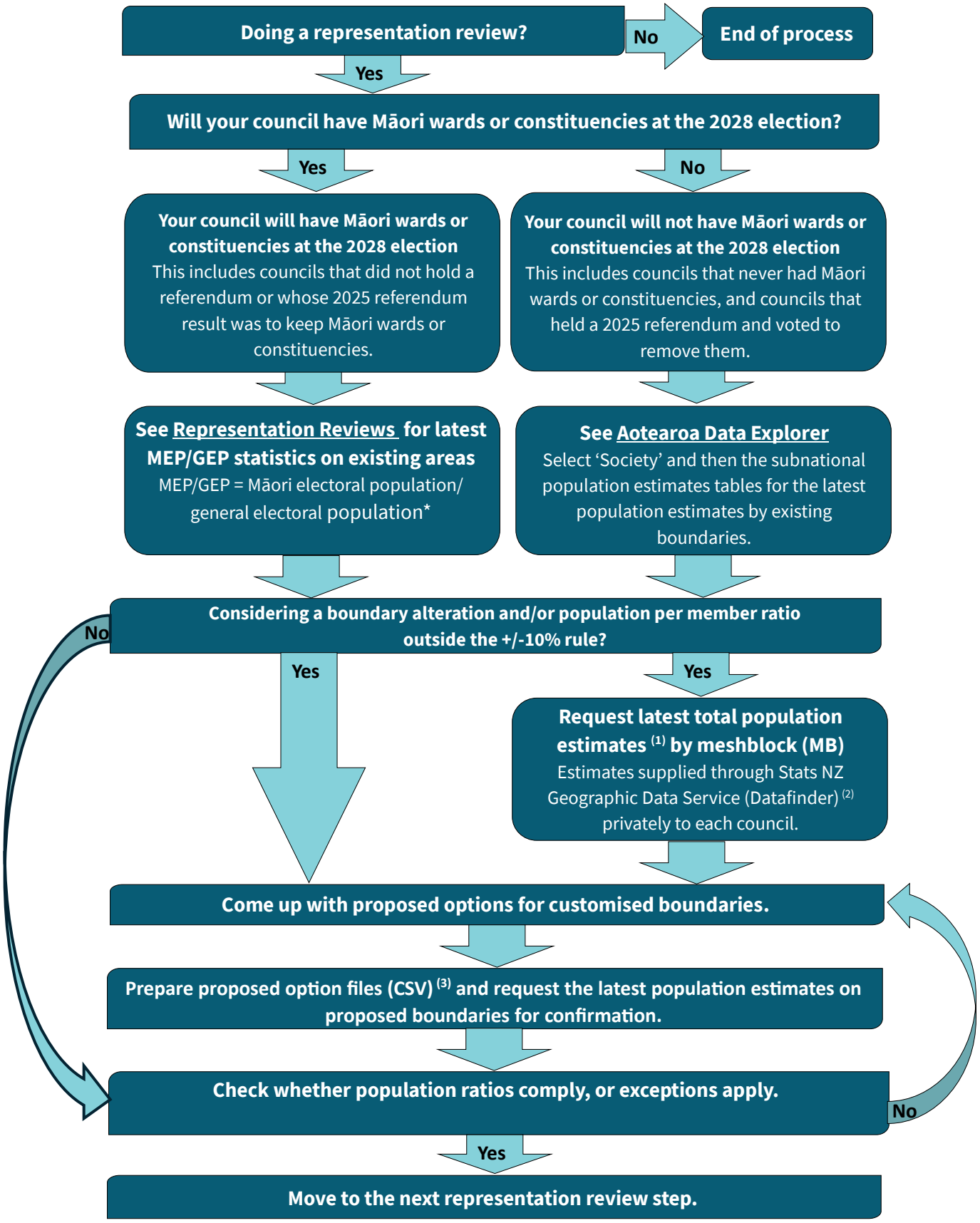
Please email any comments to representationreview@stats.govt.nz

Document history

Version	Issue Date	Changes
V1.0	1/01/2024	First release for the local government commission website.
V2.0	8/07/2024	Separate geospatial and population guidelines. Add further clarification on the use of meshblock population estimates.
V3.0	30/10/2026	Update for 2026 representation review cycle.

Process flow diagram

Figure 1. Process for using population data for preparation of representation review



*The MEP/GEP split only applies if your council still has Māori wards or constituencies. Otherwise, if your council no longer has Māori wards or constituencies, you will need to request total population estimates.

Note: MEP/GEP statistics are not available by meshblock, Statistical area 2 (SA2) is the lowest geography these estimates can go.

Notes:

(1) The June 2026 population estimates are available on request from 25 November 2026. To request these please email us at representationreview@stats.govt.nz
(2) Meshblock estimates from the Datafinder tool allows councils and the Local Government Commission to explore boundary alterations by aggregating populations to local government electoral areas (including wards, constituencies, local board areas, community, and subdivisions) that meet legislated requirements. The tool is not to allow decisions to be made about individual meshblocks per se, but just what sets of meshblocks could be aggregated to form a given set of wards or constituencies. Stats NZ will confirm the population of the proposed wards or constituencies boundaries before a council's submission (see next steps).
(3) See section 'Data Structure' below for the format requirements for supplying the CSV files.

About population estimates

While meshblock population estimates serve a specific administrative and statistical purpose, they are not official statistics and have limitations in their accuracy and intended use. Higher level geographies such as SA2s are published as official statistics.

Basis

The 2023-base meshblock population estimates are derived from the results of the 2023 Census and the 2023 Post-enumeration Survey, and updated for subsequent births, deaths, and migration. These estimates are not considered official statistics but are customised data intended for aggregation to higher geographic levels where data quality is better. They are not intended to be used as precise population measures for individual meshblocks.

These meshblock estimates should not be disseminated to entities beyond approved users, who are usually specified council employees. This restriction is due to concerns about accuracy and ensuring that the data is used appropriately.

While meshblock estimates themselves are not suitable for wider dissemination, estimates aggregated to higher geographic levels (such as proposed or final council areas) are suitable for broader use. Census counts at meshblock level are also not published but are available on request to info@stats.govt.nz.

Population statistics – user guide has more information about population statistics including the important differences between census counts and population estimates.

Subject to revision

The subnational population estimates are subject to revision. Annual revisions currently occur, mainly to incorporate updated estimates of external (international) migration and internal migration. Estimates are also revised after new census data becomes available.

Meshblock population estimates are available for use in the representation review work in 2026. They align with provisional *Subnational population estimates: At 30 June 2025*, which were released in October 2025. Subnational population estimates as at 30 June 2026 for local government electoral areas are available from 25 November 2026. Any request for estimates made after that date will use 2026 estimates. Subnational estimates are published annually and can be used to compare data over time.

Rounding

The population estimates have been rounded to the nearest 10, following standard rounding rules for population estimates. This is to avoid conveying spurious levels of precision and to maintain data confidentiality.

More data

Aotearoa Data Explorer – our free online tool has more subnational population estimates tables available.

Data structure

Supplying a CSV file for a proposal

Stats NZ will process and produce population estimates for custom geography requests from CSV (Comma Separated Value) files supplied with a list of meshblock ID's defining the proposed areas of interest. The data should be provided in the format as detailed below.

File format

1. Save CSV files in UTF-8 format.
2. CSV naming: include your territorial authority or regional council name, interested boundaries options, and date of supply.
   Examples:
   - hastings_ward_option1_20220305
   - hawkesbay_constituency_option2_20221215
   - manawatu_maori_ward_option3_20220807
   - ruapehu_community_board_option3_20220131.

   Check points:
   - all text in lowercase

- date in format yyyymmdd
- underscore (_), NOT spaces.

3. CSV contents: include only 3 columns, meshblock code (MB), meshblock version, and proposed electoral boundary name that the meshblocks will be aggregated from.

Figure 2: Typical examples of various supplied CSV files for processing

meshblock_code	meshblock_version	ward
1544800	MB2022_V1_00	North Ward
1544900	MB2022_V1_00	North Ward
1545000	MB2022_V1_00	North Ward
1545100	MB2022_V1_00	North Ward
1545200	MB2022_V1_00	North Ward

meshblock_code	meshblock_version	maori_ward
1544800	MB2023_V1_00	Te Purutanga Mauri Pūmanawa
1544900	MB2023_V1_00	Te Purutanga Mauri Pūmanawa
1545000	MB2023_V1_00	Te Purutanga Mauri Pūmanawa
1545100	MB2023_V1_00	Te Purutanga Mauri Pūmanawa
1545200	MB2023_V1_00	Te Purutanga Mauri Pūmanawa

Note: the latest 'meshblock_version' should be used at the time of supply, which for requests in 2026 is MB2026_V1_00.

Check points:

- CSV column heading: spell out the full name, use singular form, always in lowercase, and linked using underscore (_), NOT space.

- Each CSV file should be prepared as a concordance for one geography only. For example, if you are considering changing boundaries for both general wards and Māori wards, supply two separate CSVs.

- Include **all** meshblocks for your Territorial Authority/Regional Council (TA/RC), **not** only the areas you consider changing (include meshblocks with 0 population). For example, if you have a total of 214 meshblocks in your TA/RC, you should have all of them with the corresponding proposed electoral boundary for wards and constituencies.

- Ensure meshblock numbers include the leading zeroes.

Charges

Total population estimates

Stats NZ charges a standard rate of $310 + GST (or a 2-hour job) for all councils requesting population estimates to confirm populations of proposed boundaries. This charge will include the following:

- initial request
- follow up requests for estimates on different boundary options (up to 2 options).

An additional cost will occur if you have more than two additional boundary options. The additional charge will depend on the complexity of final boundaries your council requested.

MEP/GEP estimates

Stats NZ charges a standard rate of $620 + GST (or 4-hour job) for all councils requesting MEP/GEP data. This charge will include the following:

- initial request
- follow up requests for estimates on different boundary options (up to 6 options).

An additional cost will occur if you have more than six boundary options. The additional charge will depend on the complexity of final boundaries your council requested.

Additional resources

Representation review resources has the Stats NZ guidelines about the requirements for the creation and supply of spatial datasets of electoral geographies. The spatial datasets allow Stats NZ to identify electoral boundaries to incorporate any changes into their digital meshblock pattern.

Summary

The process flow will help councils to understand what population data to request and how the supplied population data should be used in the representation review process. The data structure guidelines will help Stats NZ process the information received from councils more efficiently with reduced time spent checking and modifying the supplied datasets for loading into our systems. The improvements will ensure accuracy and completeness of data throughout the process.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Stats NZ staff for assistance via this email address: representationreview@stats.govt.nz.