

Minister Russell – speaking points for the Data Symposium 2023

The following are the speech notes for the speech that Minister for Statistics Hon Deborah Russell gave at the Data Symposium 2023, 19 March 2023. Minister Russell delivered her speech on behalf of Minister Sepuloni, Minister for Social Development and Employment, who was unable to attend. Please note that actual delivery may have varied from these speech notes.

Talking points

- Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa. Talofa lava, warm Pacific greetings to you all.
- Thank you very much for your lovely welcome – it's great to be here.
- I would like to give a special welcome to our overseas speakers. Thank you for contributing to this valuable conversation.
- Thank you to Te Rourou Tātaritanga and the Social Wellbeing Agency for your hard work in organising this hui and creating space for such important discussions.
- Your theme *Our Data Sources as a Strategic National Asset* is very timely.
- Over the past few weeks, Aotearoa New Zealand has experienced significant weather events with devastating impacts for our people, their livelihoods, and communities. I want to acknowledge people who have been impacted by these events and suffered loss.
- Through these crises, data and technology has helped us to understand what has happened, who has been affected, and where they are.
- We have used weather data, land data, Census data, transport data, and a range of other data and information to understand what has happened, and to whom.
- Data has been critical in our response and recovery, to help know where and how to assist people.
- This shows we need to treat data as a strategic national asset and give it the corresponding priority. So, what are the opportunities that come with this approach?
- I want to outline three opportunities for your consideration.

Understanding that data can improve lives

- Firstly, we need to understand our data needs, what we can afford to collect and maintain, and how to maximise the use of the data we collect.

- Across Government we collect large amounts of information – the Census is the largest and most visible of this data collection. Almost everything we do in Government requires the collection of data.
- Every time we collect data, we must be clear about our needs, understand the most efficient way of collecting it, avoid duplication of existing data, and enable our data to be shared and used across government. This is where the Integrated Data Infrastructure stemmed from, and as technology develops, we need to think of what next in this area.
- I want to give a shout-out to those agencies, such as the Social Wellbeing Agency, who are sharing data across the social sector, wider stakeholders and to other groups.
- Recent projects with data have enabled us to know more about our COVID vaccination rates, understand who has debt to Government and the characteristics of that debt, and provide advice to Ministers about youth offending and young people in the education system with the highest needs.
- All these projects used existing data sources and enabled it to be analysed and presented in a way that could advise Ministers and the social sector, inform decision-makers and improve New Zealanders' lives.

Working with communities and iwi on our data approaches

- The second opportunity is to educate the public on how, when, and why Government uses data, and support their trust and confidence in our systems, processes, and people.
- The amount of data and information in today's world is increasing at an alarming rate.
- We need to continue to inform New Zealanders on the reasons why the Government needs good quality data, for example, data on health services to plan our budgets, data on children to plan for new schools, and data on our workforce so we can plan for workforce skill gaps.
- We need to continue to ensure New Zealanders about the privacy and the safety of the data that we hold on them.
- We need to be transparent about the data we collect, why and how we will use it. This is where the Data Protection and Use Policy is so important. This policy was developed by the social sector to provide a shared set of rules for the respectful, trusted, and transparent use of personal information.
- In addition, the Government's Data Exchange provides a safe, secure and easy method for government and service providers to transfer data, alongside clear guidelines about how data is used.
- We also have The Principles for the Safe and Effective Use of Analytics, along with Aotearoa's Algorithm Charter, which all reflect a common set of values and principles that will service the sector well in seeking to take the public with us.

- These mechanisms all set a way of working that can give the public trust in our data systems.

Data must reflect all of our communities

- My final point is that data has to be for everyone and enable us to see ourselves.
- We need to connect with, and better understand the needs of our Pacific, Māori, ethnic and disabled communities, and be better at reflecting these issues in our data.
- Our country is becoming more diverse. By 2043 the Asian population will have the highest percentage of the Auckland population and across the country make up 26 percent of the population.
- Māori and Pacific populations are also expected to grow, making up 21 percent and 11 percent of New Zealand's population by 2043.
- One aspect that is personal to me is ensuring data systems are culturally responsive, for example, I may be categorised as Pacific in some data sources, but I am also Samoan, Tongan and Pākehā. How do we reflect these differences in what we collect?
- Many groups have historically been left out because we don't know enough about those groups, don't know how to reach them, or don't know the right way to collect information.
- A recent example of addressing this is the new disability indicator, based on government administrative data, that can be used to explore outcomes of disabled people.
- I want to acknowledge the leadership from the Social Wellbeing Agency and Whaikaha, working alongside the disabled people's sector, to improve the collection of data and statistics on disabled people.
- This is one example of our evolving data systems and how we can develop data sources as a strategic national asset.
- All of you, whether you are in Government, universities, private sector or NGOs, have a role in enabling trusted and reliable data systems and being innovative in our approaches. For example, I know Stats NZ is looking at how we can use more of Government administrative data to collect census type information. These innovations reduce the burden on communities and still enable good data collection.
- If we get our needs right, take communities and iwi with us, and continue to reflect our evolving communities in the data, we can make a real difference to people's lives.
- Thank you for your passion and contribution to Aotearoa New Zealand's data systems.
- I wish you all the best for the symposium.
- Mālō 'Aupito.