



# Mapping te reo Māori

Tokona te Raki

March 2025



Authors: Diana Russell, Hugh Dixon, Connor McIndoe, and Satrio Wiradika

Peer reviewer: Hillmarè Schulze,

This report was prepared by Business and Economic Research Limited (BERL) for Tokona te Raki. The views, opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Tokona te Raki or any other organisation. While BERL has exercised all reasonable skill and care in the preparation of information in this report, we accept no liability in contract, tort, or otherwise for any loss, damage, injury or expense, whether direct, indirect, or consequential, arising out of the provision of information in this report.

This report is intended for informational purposes only and should not be construed as professional advice. Any use of this report is at the user's own risk. The information in this report is current as of 31 January and may be subject to change without notice. BERL retains copyright in this report. Any reproduction, adaptation, or distribution of this report without BERL's prior written consent is prohibited. By accessing and using this report, you agree to indemnify and hold harmless BERL from any claims arising from its use.

## Disclaimer

The results in this paper are not official statistics. They have been created for research purposes from the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), managed by Statistics New Zealand. The opinions, findings, recommendations, and conclusions expressed in this paper are those of the authors, not Statistics New Zealand.

Access to the anonymised data used in this study was provided by Statistics New Zealand under the security and confidentiality provisions of the Statistics Act 2022. Only people authorised by the Statistics Act 1975 are allowed to see data about a particular person, household, business, or organisation, and the results in this paper have been confidentialised to protect these groups from identification and to keep their data safe.

Careful consideration has been given to the privacy, security, and confidentiality issues associated with using administrative and survey data in the IDI. Further detail can be found in the privacy impact assessment for the IDI available from [www.stats.govt.nz](http://www.stats.govt.nz).

The IDI sources that contributed to the analysis in this report are the Te Kupenga survey 2013, the Te Kupenga survey 2018, Census 2013, Census 2018, and Census 2023.

Data retrieved through the IDI requires this paper to suppress counts of fewer than six before applying random rounding to base three.

## Executive summary

The 2023 Census reveals that 18,519 people of Māori descent in the South Island can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, equal to ten percent of Māori in the South Island. A significant concentration of South Island te reo Māori speakers reside in Canterbury (53 percent). In comparison, 20 percent of Māori in the North Island can hold a conversation in te reo Māori. Nationwide, 18 percent of Māori report being able to speak te reo either very well or fairly well, while half of Māori said they can speak no more than a few words or phrases in te reo. This gap between North Island and South Island proficiency in te reo Māori presents learnings that can be adopted to increase the proficiency within the South Island. The data suggests that the higher the proportion of Māori and Māori speakers within a community, the more likely someone is to speak, read, write, and understand te reo Māori.

This report explores the environment, conditions and variables that could encourage proficiency in te reo Māori, creating 'pockets of promise'. Approximately one-third of Māori consider the use of te reo Māori in daily life to be very important or quite important, whereas just over one-quarter (27 percent) find it not at all important.

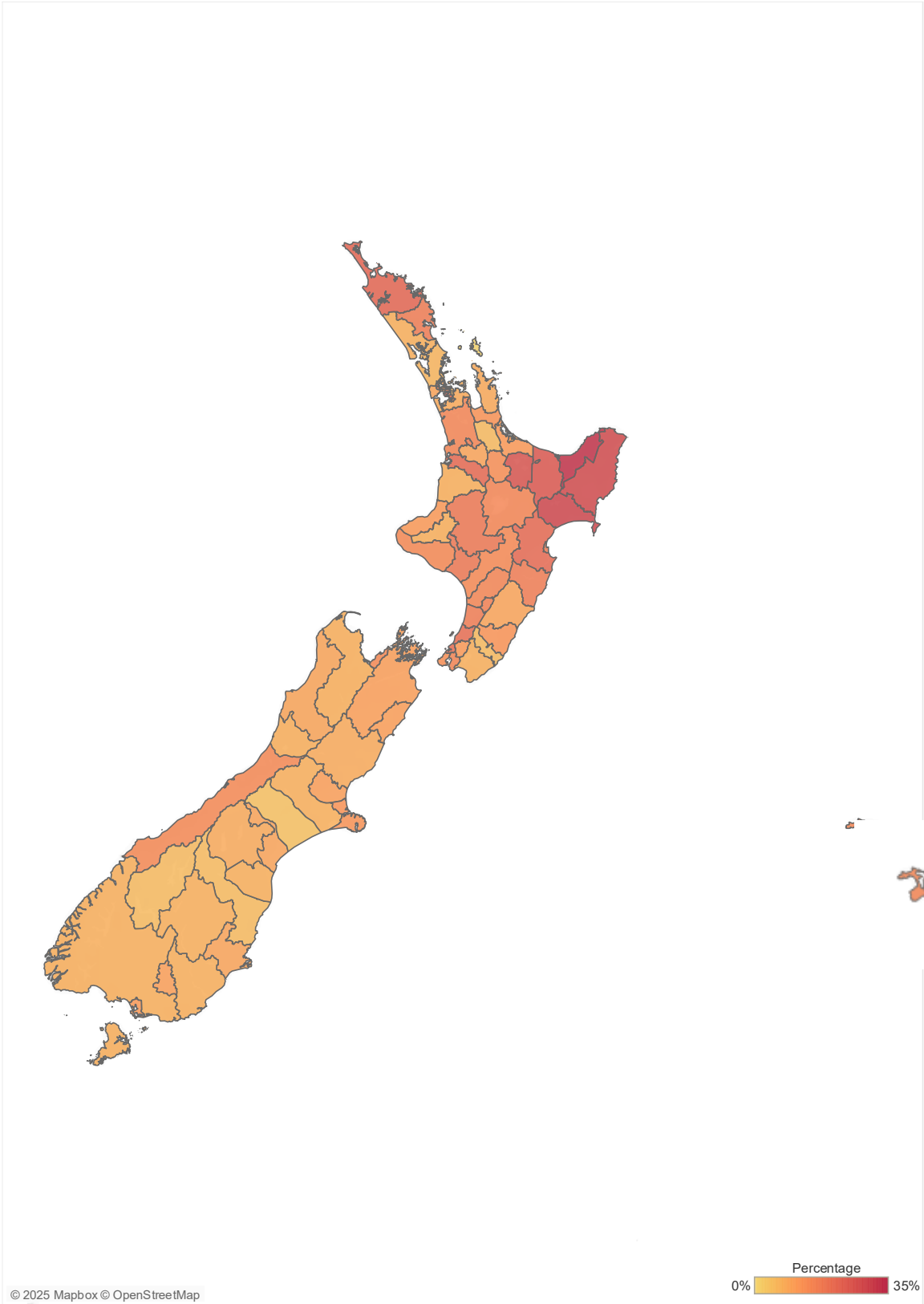
There is a notable gap of 425,900 people of Māori descent who value the use of te reo Māori in everyday life but cannot speak it well.

This gap highlights that proficiency in te reo Māori requires more than individual willingness. It necessitates accessible infrastructure and frequent, informal opportunities to use the language. It is in creating this ecosystem that te reo use can grow.

34 percent of Māori in the North Island and 20 percent of Māori in the South Island believe that using te reo Māori themselves in daily life is very important.

An interesting finding is that Māori in the North Island are 1.7 times more likely (than Māori in the South Island) to believe that using te reo Māori themselves in daily life is very important or quite important. Conversely, Māori in the South Island are 1.6 times more likely (than Māori in the North Island) to believe that using te reo Māori themselves in daily life is not at all important.

Figure 1 Proportion of Ngāi Tahu living in each district or local board area who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, Census 2023



Source: BERL analysis, Census 2023

## The key factors that influence the uptake of te reo Māori

A major factor contributing to the thriving and growing of te reo Māori is the connection to other te reo Māori speakers. This is particularly important in informal situations, such as speaking te reo as a first language, in the home with adults and children, and having access to Kura Kaupapa and Māori medium schools for both primary and secondary schooling. Overall, the key factors that contribute to Māori learning and using te reo Māori are very cyclical. For example, to learn te reo Māori as a first language, the previous generation must first speak/learn te reo Māori themselves to pass it on to their tamariki and mokopuna as a first language. This starts the cycle and allows growth in use to flourish.

The data suggests that the higher the proportion of Māori and Māori speakers within a community, the more likely someone is to speak, read, write, and understand te reo Māori. This finding is clearly demonstrated in Gisborne and Auckland. Gisborne has the highest proportion of fluent te reo speakers (21 percent) in comparison to any other region, despite only three percent of the total Māori population living in Gisborne. However, Māori account for 54 percent of the region's population. Conversely, Auckland has the third lowest proportion of fluent te reo speakers (5.4 percent). Although 24 percent of Māori live in Auckland (the largest region for the Māori population), Māori only account for 12 percent of the region's population.

Gisborne, where Māori account for 54 percent of the region's population, has the highest proportion of fluent te reo speakers (21 percent). Conversely, the South Island, where Māori account for the lowest proportion of the region's population, has the lowest proportion of fluent te reo speakers (3.6 percent).

The relationship between larger numbers of Māori, in comparison to other ethnic groups, and te reo Māori proficiency is straight forward.<sup>1</sup> In order to speak te reo Māori, you need other te reo Māori speakers to kōrero with. In order to have places available to learn or speak te reo Māori, there must first be a demand for these spaces alongside te reo speakers to teach and create these spaces. This

---

<sup>1</sup> Statistics New Zealand defines ethnicity as "the ethnic group or groups that people identify with or feel they belong to. Ethnicity is a measure of cultural affiliation, as opposed to race, ancestry, nationality or citizenship. Ethnicity is self-perceived, and people can affiliate with more than one ethnic group."

comes down to having enough Māori, and te reo Māori speakers, living in a suburb, city, town, or region. Again, in order to have a Māori medium primary or secondary school, you need the population (students), as well as teachers proficient in the language. This network of factors all works to support te reo Māori use and growth. This helps explain why regions with a higher proportion of Māori (such as Gisborne), have higher rates of fluency in te reo Māori.

Māori in the North Island are 2.3 times more likely to be fluent in speaking te reo Māori than Māori in the South Island.

While 84 percent of Aotearoa New Zealand's Māori population live in the North Island, it is home to 93 percent of fluent (very well or well) te reo speakers. By comparing factors that influence the higher uptake of te reo in the North Island, we can identify key areas of focus that will enable a greater uptake in the South Island. As mentioned, density and being surrounded by other te reo speakers is a strong influencing factor. In the South Island, Māori account for 10 percent of the population, and in the North Island, Māori account for 20 percent of the population. The seven South Island regions are also the seven regions with the lowest proportion of Māori residents. As a result, there are fewer options available for Māori living in the South Island to kōrero both formally and informally in te reo Māori.

## Speaking te reo as a first language

Overall, being introduced to te reo Māori as a first language is a significant contributor to being fluent in te reo. However, it's not the only contributor. While 56 percent of Māori in the South Island who are fluent in te reo learned it as a first language, 43 percent did not despite still becoming fluent in te reo Māori.

Māori in the North Island are 1.6 times more likely than Māori in the South Island to have learned te reo Māori as a first language.

Sixty percent of those who learned te reo Māori as a first language said that they can speak and understand te reo today—35 percent said, 'very well' and 25 percent said 'fairly well'. However, without a community of te reo Māori speakers, even those who learn te reo Māori as a first language will lose their proficiency. This is evident in the 2018 Te Kupenga survey, where 40 percent of all those who learned te reo as a first language, self-rated their ability to speak te reo as 'not very well'. For proficiency to remain and grow, the supporting network needs to be present.

## Speaking te reo Māori in the home

Our analysis finds that fluent te reo speakers predominantly learn it at home as well as speaking it with relatives, friends, neighbours, or at hui where te reo Māori is being spoken.

80 percent of Māori who are fluent in te reo acquired it by listening and speaking to parents or other at home, as well as with relatives, friends, or neighbours not living with them.

Almost two-thirds of Māori who can speak more than just a few words or phrases acquired te reo Māori by listening and speaking to parents or others living at home, while 68 percent acquired te reo Māori by listening or speaking with relatives, friends, or neighbours not living with them. It paints a clear picture: where the more a language is spoken around you, the more you use it and the more fluent you become.

The more connected an individual is to te ao Māori, including their iwi or hapū, the more likely they are to be surrounded by people who speak, understand, read, and/or write te reo Māori. The more the language is integrated and normalised, the more people's proficiency will grow and ripple further into the community and across the motu.

## Immersion and density

The higher the density of Māori in a town or region, the higher the access to kura kaupapa Māori and Māori medium secondary schools. Overall, there are sixteen regions across Aotearoa New Zealand. As mentioned, Gisborne is the region with the highest proportion of Māori and the highest proportion of te reo Māori speakers. Additionally, Gisborne is also the region with the sixth largest number of Māori medium schools. To put it in perspective, Gisborne, with a total population of 28,656 people of Māori descent, has 22 Māori medium schools comprising 13 primary/intermediate schools, and nine composite/secondary schools servicing a region of 8,385 square kilometers.<sup>2</sup> In comparison, the South Island with a population of 133,656 Māori, has 33 Māori medium schools across the entire South Island servicing an area of 150,437 square kilometers.

---

<sup>2</sup> The classification criteria for Māori descent are a person's genealogical descent. Statistics New Zealand states "a person has Māori descent if they are of Māori race of New Zealand; this includes any descent of such a person. This definition requires people to know their biological ancestry".



These South Island schools can be found in Canterbury (sixteen), Nelson (six), Otago (three), Southland (three), Tasman (two), Marlborough (two), and the West Coast (one). These seven South Island regions also account for seven of the eight lowest regions for Māori medium schools. While Canterbury is the second largest region in New Zealand by population, it is number nine in terms of Māori medium schools. Māori in the South Island are also 23 percent less likely than Māori in the North Island to learn te reo at Kōhanga Reo, kura kaupapa Māori, or wharekura.

Kōhanga Reo, kura kaupapa Māori or wharekura are significant contributors to fluency in te reo Māori. For those who self-report as being excellent at speaking te reo, 50 percent said that they acquired the language at a Māori medium school. In comparison, for those who speak te reo, but ‘not very well’, only eight percent acquired it at a Māori medium school.

### **Leveraging pockets of density to boost te reo Māori proficiency**

Auckland’s Māori population and te reo Māori proficiency can be used as an example of how pockets of high Māori and high connection to te ao Māori culture can be leveraged to grow and develop te reo Māori. For example, the Auckland region has the third lowest proportion of fluent te reo speakers (5.4 percent), although 24 percent of Māori, across Aotearoa, live in Auckland (the largest region for the Māori population). However, density-wise, Māori only account for 12 percent of the region’s population.

Auckland has the third lowest proportion of fluent te reo speakers (5.4 percent). However, if you zoom down closer into Auckland’s suburbs, you will find pockets of high Māori populations, and high te reo Māori proficiency.

The two Auckland Local Board Areas (LBAs) of Manurewa and Māngere-Ōtāhuhu have te reo Māori proficiency of 22 percent and 21 percent, respectively.<sup>3</sup> This puts them in line with Gisborne’s te reo proficiency of 21 percent. Manurewa has the largest Māori population in Auckland, while Māngere-Ōtāhuhu’s Māori ethnic population is much lower at 17 percent.

---

<sup>3</sup> AN LBA refers to a selected area within a greater administrative area. In this case, Manurewa and Māngere-Ōtāhuhu are two LBAs within Auckland, which has a total of 21 LBAs. Auckland is the only region with Aotearoa New Zealand that has a two-tier governance structure consisting of Auckland Council, and local boards representing select areas.

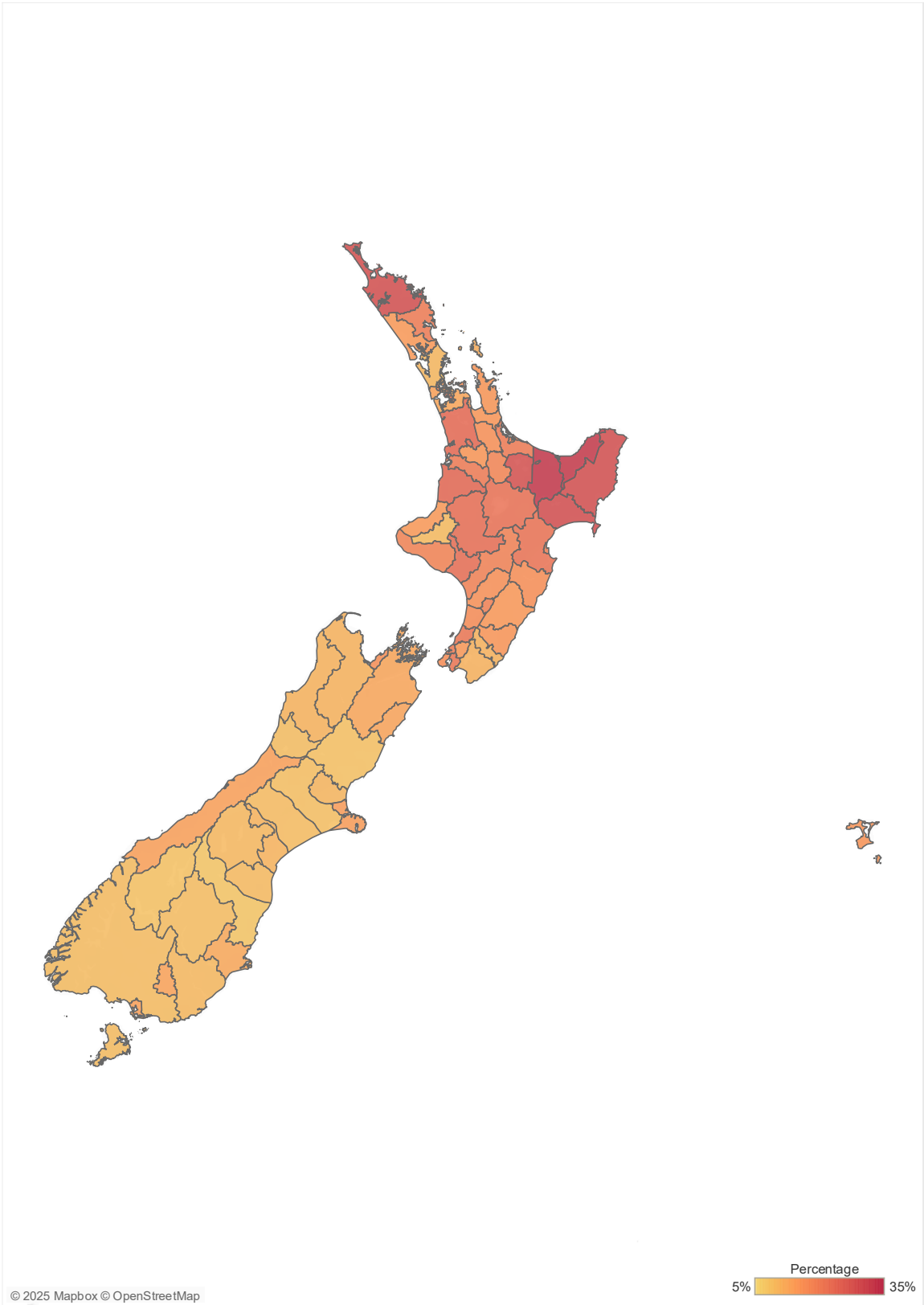
## Urban and rural split

Te Kupenga data shows that rural Māori are slightly more likely than urban Māori to speak, understand, read, and write te reo Māori. However, 81 percent of Māori live in urban areas, while the remaining 19 percent live in rural areas. Rural Māori were:

- 20 percent more likely to speak te reo Māori
- Nine percent more likely to understand spoken te reo Māori
- 11 percent more likely to read te reo Māori, with understanding
- 12 percent more likely to write te reo Māori.

Rural Māori are 20 percent less likely to acquire te reo at a university or polytechnic, and ten percent less likely to acquire te reo at a wānanga, work, community-based course, Kōhanga Reo, kura kaupapa Māori, or wharekura, or other primary, secondary, or Māori boarding school.

Figure 2 Proportion of all people of Māori ethnicity living in each district or local board area who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, Census 2023



Source: BERL analysis, Census 2023

## **The importance of access to te reo community spaces for both formal and informal kōrero**

In the South Island, only 11 percent of the population is of Māori ethnicity. As a result, there is less access to places to learn, hear, read or speak te reo Māori. This includes less access to Māori medium schools, te reo courses, te ao Māori, community, iwi, hapū, and marae. These are key components of the network needed for te reo Māori use to grow and thrive.

**In comparison to Māori in the North Island, Māori in the South Island are:**

- 23 percent less likely to learn te reo by listening and speaking to parents or other people living at home
- 15 percent less likely to learn te reo by listening or speaking with relatives, friends or neighbours not living with them
- 34 percent less likely to learn te reo by going home to their iwi or hapū area(s)
- 14 percent more likely to learn te reo at another primary, secondary or Māori boarding school
- Four percent less likely to learn te reo at by studying at a Māori wānanga
- 32 percent more likely to learn te reo by studying at another tertiary institution such as university or polytechnic
- 17 percent less likely to learn te reo by going to hui and listening to te reo Māori being spoken
- Ten percent less likely to learn te reo at work or community-based courses
- Equally likely to teach themselves te reo.

It paints a clear picture that the more a language is spoken around you, the more you use it, and the more fluent you become.

## Age and sex

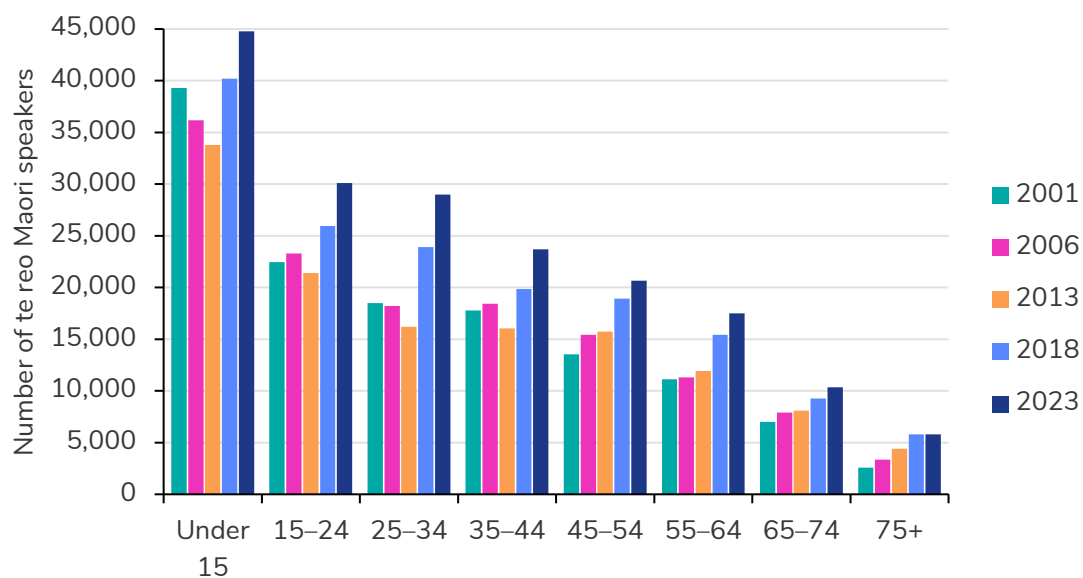
The proportion of Māori ethnicity who can speak te reo Māori has been steadily declining since 2001 (Table 1). However, due to population growth, the number of people of Māori ethnicity who can speak te reo Māori has been steadily increasing (Figure 3).

**Table 1 Proportion of Māori speakers grouped by sex, 2001–2023 (%)**

Census year	Tane	Wahine	Ngāi Tahu	Total
2001	24.6	25.7	–	25.2
2006	23.1	24.4	–	23.7
2013	20.4	22.1	11.2	21.3
2018	19.4	21.6	–	20.5
2023	19.1	21.8	13.8	20.5

Source: BERL analysis, Statistics New Zealand, Census 2001–2023, Statistics New Zealand IDI

**Figure 3 Number of people of Māori ethnicity who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, 2001–2023**



Source: BERL analysis, Statistics New Zealand, Census 2001–2023

# Contents

1	Introduction.....	6
1.1	Data.....	6
1.2	Data limitations.....	7
2	Quick statistics.....	9
3	Profile of te reo Māori speakers .....	11
3.1	Around 18 percent of Māori are fluent in te reo Māori .....	12
3.2	Changing numbers of te reo Māori speakers .....	13
3.3	Over half of te reo Māori speakers are aged under 34 years old .....	16
4	Regional overview analysis.....	21
4.1	Māori in the North Island are more proficient in te reo Māori.....	21
4.2	Rural Māori are more likely to be proficient in te reo Māori .....	28
5	What factors influence te reo Māori proficiency? .....	32
5.1	High proficiency if your first language is te reo Māori .....	32
5.2	High proficiency if you live in an area with a dense Māori population ...	33
5.3	Social activities – spaces to converse in te reo Māori .....	39
5.4	Engaged in Māori culture .....	42
5.5	Connected to marae.....	45
6	Profile of Māori in the South Island who are proficient in te reo Māori.....	46
6.1	The amount of te reo spoken at home.....	47

6.2	Informal environment for speaking te reo Māori is important.....	50
6.3	Attending Māori medium education.....	52
6.4	Highest qualifications for te reo Māori speakers.....	55
7	Profile of Ngāi Tahu te reo Māori speakers .....	57
8	Conclusion.....	63

## Tables

Table 1 Proportion of Māori speakers grouped by sex, 2001–2023 (%) .....	xi
Table 2 Te Kupenga responses for proficiency at speaking te reo Māori, 2018 .....	7
Table 3 Te reo Māori proficiency (self-rated), all Aotearoa New Zealand Māori, 2018 survey (%) .....	12
Table 4 Population growth of the Māori ethnic group vs growth in te reo speakers, 2001–2023 .....	13
Table 5 The proportion of people of Māori ethnicity who could hold a conversation in te reo Māori, 2001–2023 (%) .....	15
Table 6 Proportion of each age group who can kōrero te reo Māori, Survey 2018 (%) .....	17
Table 7 Proportion of te reo Māori speakers in the Māori ethnic population, by age group, Census 2001–2023 (%) .....	17
Table 8 People of Māori ethnicity who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, 2001–2023.....	18
Table 9 Proportion of Māori descent and Ngāi Tahu iwi who could hold a conversation in te reo (%) .....	19
Table 10 Proportion of te reo Māori speakers in the Māori ethnic population, by age group and sex, Census 2001–2023 (%).....	20
Table 11 Māori in the South Island, ability to speak te reo Māori by sex, 2018 (%) .....	21
Table 12 Te reo proficiency by region, Census 2013–2023, and Te Kupenga survey 2013–2018....	22
Table 13 Te reo Māori proficiency (self-rated), North Island and Māori in the South Island (%).....	24
Table 14 Te reo Māori proficiency for urban and rural Māori (%) .....	29
Table 15 The importance of using te reo Māori themselves in daily life, all Māori (%) .....	29
Table 16 The importance of using te reo Māori vs. ability to speak te reo for those of Māori descent (weighted) .....	30
Table 17 Comparison of te reo Māori spoken at home, ability to speak te reo, and importance of te reo, by region (%) .....	31
Table 18 First language/s learned and still understood (%) .....	32
Table 19 The proportion of those who speak te reo as a first language, by fluency (%) .....	33
Table 20 Relationship between density of Māori and proficiency of te reo Māori (%) .....	34
Table 21 The top five Auckland LBAs for te reo Māori proficiency, and ethnic demographics, 2023 (%).....	35
Table 22 South Island suburbs that have high rates te reo Māori proficiency, listed by Territorial Authority (%) .....	37
Table 23 Amount of te reo Māori spoken outside home by te reo speakers, all Māori descent (%) ....	39
Table 24 Amount of te reo Māori spoken outside home, for those who can speak te reo, South Island of Māori descent (%) .....	41
Table 25 Participation with iwi by North Island, South Island, urban, and rural (%) .....	42
Table 26 Importance of being engaged in Māori culture (%) .....	42



Table 27 Know pepeha (tribal identity) (%) .....	43
Table 28 Participated in cultural practice, in previous 12 months (%) .....	44
Table 29 Connection to marae tipuna (ancestral marae) (%) .....	45
Table 30 Ways of acquiring te reo Māori, North Island and South Island (%) .....	47
Table 31 The amount of te reo Māori spoken at home, with members of household (%) .....	49
Table 32 Ways of acquiring te reo Māori by proficiency, South Island (%) .....	50
Table 33 Ways of acquiring te reo Māori by proficiency, North Island (%) .....	52
Table 34 Number of Māori medium schools, by region, and te reo Māori proficiency .....	53
Table 35 Relationship between Māori medium schools per Māori ethnic population and te reo Māori ability, by region, 2023 Census .....	54
Table 36 Top six regions for Māori medium schooling vs ability to speak te reo Māori, 2023 .....	55
Table 37 Bottom six regions for Māori medium schooling vs ability to speak te reo Māori, 2023 .....	55
Table 38 Highest qualifications of Māori who are very fluent in speaking te reo, in comparison to the national population (%) .....	56
Table 39 Proportion of Ngāi Tahu who can hold a conversation in te reo by region, Census 2023 ...	57
Table 40 The proportion of Ngāi Tahu who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, by Canterbury districts, 2023 .....	59
Table 41 The proportion of Ngāi Tahu who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, by Wellington Regional Council districts, 2023 .....	60
Table 42 The proportion of Ngāi Tahu who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, Auckland Local Board Area, 2023 .....	60
Table 43 The proportion of Ngāi Tahu who can hold a conversation in an official language, by select regions .....	61
Table 44 The number of Ngāi Tahu who can hold a conversation in an official language, by select regions .....	62

## Figures

Figure 1 Proportion of Ngāi Tahu living in each district or local board area who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, Census 2023 .....	iii
Figure 2 Proportion of all people of Māori ethnicity living in each district or local board area who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, Census 2023 .....	ix
Figure 3 Number of people of Māori ethnicity who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, 2001–2023 .....	xi
Figure 4 Te reo Māori proficiency (self-rated), all Aotearoa New Zealand Māori, 2018 Survey .....	13
Figure 5 The number of people of Māori ethnicity who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, 2001–2023 .....	14
Figure 6 Ability to speak te reo Māori fairly well, well, or very well, by age group, 2018 Te Kupenga .....	16
Figure 7 Proportion of each age group who can kōrero te reo Māori (%) .....	17
Figure 8 Proportion of te reo Māori speakers in the Māori ethnic population, by age group, 2001–2023 (%) .....	18
Figure 9 Ability to hold a conversation in te reo Māori, by region .....	21
Figure 10 Where Aotearoa New Zealand’s te reo speakers live, by region (%) .....	23
Figure 11 Ability to speak te reo Māori, by North Island and South Island (%) .....	25
Figure 12 Ability to understand spoken te reo Māori, by North Island and South Island (%) .....	26
Figure 13 Ability to write te reo Māori, by Māori in the North and South Island (%) .....	27
Figure 14 Ability to read te reo Māori, with understanding, by North Island and South Island (%) .....	28
Figure 15 Comparison of te reo Māori proficiency, spoken at home, and perception of the importance of te reo Māori (%) .....	30
Figure 16 Māori population density for South Island suburbs, Census 2023 .....	38
Figure 17 Proportion of Ngāi Tahu who can hold a conversation in te reo by region, Census 2023 .....	58

# 1 Introduction

This report was commissioned by Tokona te Raki to develop an evidence base for understanding te reo Māori use. Sir Mason Durie (2008) recognised te reo as an “essential ingredient of culture and a key to cultural identity.” He emphasised that the “extent of usage by Māori” and the “domains where it is possible to speak, hear, read, or write Māori” are two important aspects of Māori language use.

Improving understanding in this area, including the barriers and enablers of further uptake and broader integration, will support stakeholders in identifying opportunities for improving both aspects of Māori language use.

The aim of this project is to provide Tokona Te Raki with a mapping of evidence and data that presents the potential web of elements and outcomes that impact te reo use. It will also allow us to identify data gaps that could inform further primary research. s

## 1.1 Data

### Te Kupenga

To map the use of te reo Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand, BERL takes a deep dive into the Te Kupenga surveys of 2018 and 2013 inside the Statistics New Zealand Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI). The 2018 Te Kupenga survey was conducted following the 2018 Census by 8,500 people who identified as having Māori ethnicity and/or descent at the 2018 Census.

By utilising the IDI, we can take a more granular look at what the te reo journey looks like for Māori. We look for and analyse trends about who can speak te reo in comparison to those who are fluent or those who do not speak te reo at all. By analysing this data, we can make conclusions and recommendations about what actions, activities, or experiences could contribute to the continued growth and proficiency of te reo in New Zealand.

### Census data

Throughout this report we draw on Census data dating as far back as Census 2001. The analysis in this report focuses predominantly on Census 2018 and Census 2023. Bringing in Census data alongside Te Kupenga has three primary benefits. Firstly, the population size from the Census is naturally much higher, therefore significantly reducing the margin of error and providing statistically reliable results for Māori in the South Island. Secondly, bringing in Census data allows us to break

our analysis down to the Ngāi Tahu population. Thirdly, the inclusion of Census 2023 data provides current, up-to-date information in comparison to 2018 Te Kupenga, which is now seven years old.

## 1.2 Data limitations

The 2018 Te Kupenga survey collected responses from 8,500 adults ages 15 years and over of Māori ethnicity and/or descent. Once this data is broken down to analyse Māori in the South Island te reo speakers, the counts become very small. Small counts can skew results and on occasion make the findings unreliable. In the South Island, the number of te reo speakers who took part in the 2018 Te Kupenga survey are as follows:

- Speaks te reo very well or well: 47 people
- Speaks te reo fairly-well: 101 people
- Speaks te reo but not very well: 349 people
- Speaks no more than a few words or phrases in te reo: 795 people.

To counter these low counts, we provide information in each section on the sample size of the responses. Additionally, we also provide results at a high level for Māori in the South Island as a whole (1,292 people), Māori in the North Island (7,208), all Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand (8,500), urban (6,910) and rural (1,589 people), and Māori in the North Island who can speak te reo Māori either fairly well, well, or very well (1,372 people).

Table 2 Te Kupenga responses for proficiency at speaking te reo Māori, 2018

	North Island	South Island
Very well / well	593	47
Fairly well	780	101
Not very well	2,252	349
No more than a few words or phrases	3,584	796
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,209</b>	<b>1,292</b>

Source: 2018 Te Kupenga

The Te Kupenga surveys for 2013 and 2018 ask questions about a person's self-rated proficiency in either speaking, reading, writing, or understanding spoken te reo Māori. Respondents are asked the following:

- **Question:** How well are you able to \_\_\_\_ (speak/read/write/understand) \_\_\_\_\_ te reo Māori in day-to-day conversation:
- Answer:
  - Very well (I can talk about almost anything in Māori)
  - Well (I can talk about many things in Māori)
  - Fairly well (I can talk about some things in Māori)
  - Not very well (I can only talk about simple/basic things in Māori)
  - No more than a few words or phrases

In comparison to the Te Kupenga survey, the 2013 and 2023 Census asked the question, “In what language could you hold a conversation about a lot of everyday things?”. The differences in the framing of questions likely results in differences between the Census responses and the Te Kupenga responses.

The survey questions asked for are sometimes subjective and may be interpreted differently for each respondent. For example, Kura Reo (reo-immersion wānanga) are a significant mechanism that is used by iwi across Aotearoa. However, Table 30 Ways of acquiring te reo Māori, North Island and South Island (%), likely picks this up under ‘work or community-based courses’, however, Kura Reo may also get picked up in under ‘study at Māori wānanga’<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> The 2018 Te Kupenga survey asked, “through study at Māori wānanga, such as Te Wānanga o Aotearoa?”.

## 2 Quick statistics

### *Holding a conversation in te reo Māori (Census 2023):*

- 20.5 percent of people of Māori ethnicity said they can hold a conversation<sup>5</sup>
- 19 percent of people of Māori descent said they can hold a conversation
- **14 percent of Ngāi Tahu** people (Māori ethnicity) said they can hold a conversation
- **12 percent of Ngāi Tahu** people (Māori descent) said they can hold a conversation
- **Ngāi Tahu people who live in the North Island are 1.5 times more likely** to hold a conversation than Ngāi Tahu people living in the South Island
- **However, Ngāi Tahu who live in Auckland are equally likely** to hold a conversation in te reo Māori than Ngāi Tahu living in the South Island/Canterbury
- **Māori in the North Island are 1.6 times more likely** to hold a conversation in te reo Māori than Māori in the South Island
- **At the 2023 Census, there were an additional 59,670 people of Māori descent** who could hold a conversation in te reo Māori, in comparison to the 2013 Census.

### *Being fluent in te reo Māori (Te Kupenga survey 2018):*

- **Māori in the North Island are 2.3 times more likely** to be fluent in speaking te reo Māori than Māori in the South Island
- **90 percent of Aotearoa New Zealand's very well or fairly well te reo** speaking population live in the North Island, while ten percent live in the South Island
- **83 percent of Māori in the South Island** who are fluent in te reo acquired it at home or with family, friends, and neighbours
- **50 percent** of those who are fluent in te reo acquired it at Kōhanga reo, kura kaupapa Māori, or wharekura

---

<sup>5</sup> "The census provides counts of Māori in two ways: Māori descent and Māori ethnicity. The two concepts are closely related but not the same. **Māori descent** is based on whakapapa while affiliation to the **Māori ethnic group** is a self-determined cultural affiliation" – Statistics New Zealand

- **15 percent** of those who are fluent in te reo Māori speak predominantly in te reo at home, whereas those who speak it fairly–well and not well do not speak te reo at home (close to zero percent)
- **Gisborne has the highest proportion** of fluent te reo speakers (21 percent). Although only three percent of Māori live in Gisborne, Māori account for 54 percent of the region's population
- **Conversely, Auckland has the third lowest proportion** of fluent te reo speakers (5.4 percent). Although 24 percent of Māori live in Auckland (the largest region for the Māori population), Māori only account for 12 percent of the region's population.

*Perception on the importance of te reo Māori (Te Kupenga survey 2018):*

- **34 percent of Māori in the North Island and 20 percent of Māori in the South Island** believe that using te reo Māori themselves in daily life is very important
- **25 percent of Māori in the North Island and 39 percent of Māori in the South Island** believe that using te reo Māori themselves in daily life is not at all important.

### 3 Profile of te reo Māori speakers

Te reo Māori speakers mostly live in the North Island, or in areas with a high Māori population density that has a strong connection to te ao Māori. Proficient speakers can be any age, and most likely have parents and/or grandparents who can speak te reo Māori. A profile of a te reo Māori speaker is as follows:

- Lives in the North Island (91 percent of Māori te reo Māori speakers live in the North Island)
- Has parents or family members living at home who speak te reo Māori (85 percent)
- Attends hui or events where te reo Māori is spoken (83 percent)
- Goes home often to or is involved with their iwi or hapū (75 percent)
- Is self-motivated to learn te reo Māori by teaching themselves (71 percent)
- Attended a Māori medium school (51 percent)
- Lives in a region with a large proportion of Māori:
  - Gisborne (**density:** 54 percent, **fluency:** 21 percent)
  - Bay of Plenty (**density:** 29 percent, **fluency:** 12 percent)
  - Hawke's Bay (**density:** 28 percent, **fluency:** 11 percent)
  - Northland (**density:** 36 percent, **fluency:** 8.9 percent)
- Lives in a local council area with a large proportion of Māori population. The top 15 out of 87 districts (and LBAs) at the 2023 Census for speaking te reo were:

1. Whakatane (33 percent)	9. Waikato (23 percent)
2. Ōpōtiki (32 percent)	10. Hamilton (23 percent)
3. Wairoa (29 percent)	11. Whanganui (22 percent)
4. Gisborne (29 percent)	12. Ruapehu (22 percent)
5. Far North (28 percent)	13. Manurewa (22 percent)
6. Rotorua (28 percent)	14. Taupo (22 percent)
7. Kawerau (27 percent)	15. Māngere-Ōtāhuhu (21 percent).
8. Waitomo (24 percent)	



### 3.1 Around 18 percent of Māori are fluent in te reo Māori

At the 2018 Census, there were an estimated 775,840 Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand. According to the Te Kupenga survey of the same year, 18 percent of those of Māori descent in Aotearoa New Zealand speak te reo fairly well or very well, while a further 31 percent said they can speak some te reo but ‘not very well’. Overall, those who speak te reo are 1.6 times more likely to be wahine with 62 percent of those who speak te reo either very well (60 percent), well (59 percent), or fairly well (63 percent) being wahine. While only 18 percent of Māori said they can speak te reo either fairly well, well, or very well, 73 percent said that the use of te reo Māori in daily life was of some importance.

For context, at the 2013 Census, 18.4 percent of people of Māori descent said they could hold a conversation in te reo Māori. At the 2023 Census, this had increased to 18.6 percent.

Te Kupenga 2018 results found that 91 percent of those who can speak te reo well or fairly well live in the North Island, while nine percent live in the South Island. This is in line with both the 2013 and 2023 Censuses, where 91 percent and 90 percent of te reo Māori speakers of Māori lived in the North Island.

*Table 3 Te reo Māori proficiency (self-rated), all Aotearoa New Zealand Māori, 2018 survey (%)*

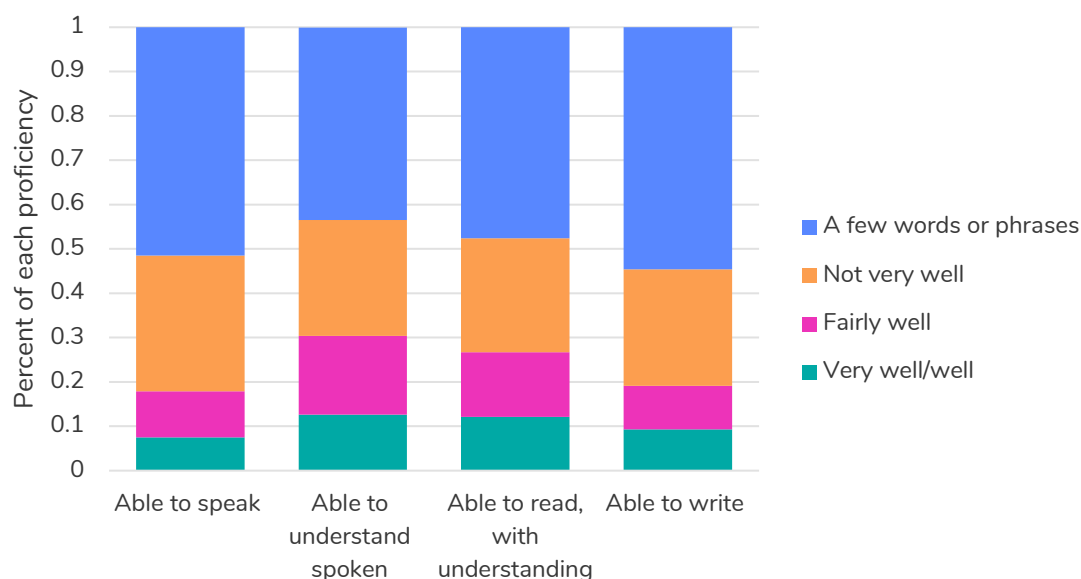
	Speak	Understand spoken	Read, with understanding	Write te reo
Very well or well	7.5	12.6	12.1	9.3
Fairly well	10.4	17.8	14.6	9.8
Not very well	30.6	26.1	25.7	26.3
No more than a few words or phrases	51.5	43.4	47.6	54.6

Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey

n=8,500

The number of Māori who can understand spoken te reo is much higher. Almost one third self-reported that they can understand te reo either fairly well or very well, and a further 26 percent said they understand but ‘not very well’. Broken down by North Island and Māori in the South Island, 32 percent of Māori in the North Island said that they can understand spoken te reo either fairly well or very well. In comparison, 20 percent of Māori in the South Island said that they can understand spoken te reo either fairly well or very well. This means that Māori in the North Island are 1.6 times more likely to understand spoken te reo Māori fairly or very well than those in the South Island.

Figure 4 Te reo Māori proficiency (self-rated), all Aotearoa New Zealand Māori, 2018 Survey



Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey

n=8,500

## 3.2 Changing numbers of te reo Māori speakers

Over the past two-decades, since the 2001 Census, the Māori ethnic population of Aotearoa New Zealand has increased by 371,805 people (71 percent). Over the same period, there has been an increase of 51,421 people of Māori ethnicity who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori (39 percent).

Figure 5 shows that the number of people who could hold a conversation in te reo Māori, has been steadily increasing since 2001. However, it declined by five percent at the 2013 Census in comparison to the 2006 Census.

Table 4 Population growth of the Māori ethnic group vs growth in te reo speakers, 2001–2023

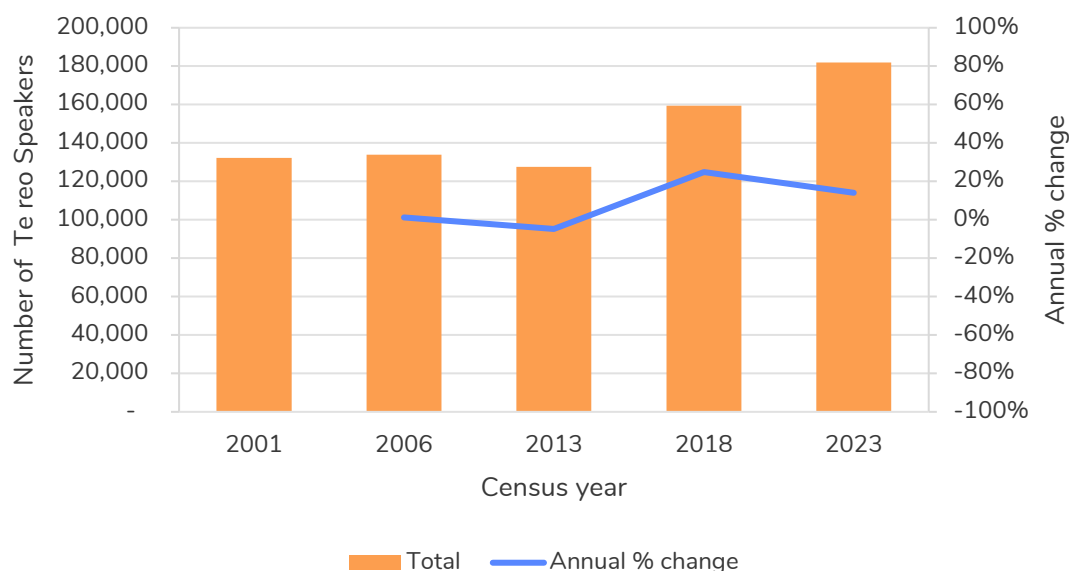
Census	Population growth	Te reo growth
2006	7%	1%
2013	6%	–5%
2018	30%	25%
2023	16%	14%

Source: Census 2001–2023

However, since the 2013 Census, the growth in te reo Māori proficiency has followed population growth much more closely. Over the past ten years, the Māori ethnic population has grown by 48 percent (288,891 people), and the number of people who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori

has grown by 42 percent. This means that since 2013, there are 54,253 more people of Māori ethnicity who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori.

Figure 5 The number of people of Māori ethnicity who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, 2001–2023



Source: BERL analysis, Census 2001, 2006, 2013, 2018, and 2023, MSD, and Statistics New Zealand IDI

### Māori ethnic group

According to Census data, the number of those of Māori ethnicity who can hold a conversation in te reo increased by 51,421 people over the past two decades, between 2001 and 2023. However, this is a decline from 25 percent of Māori ethnic population in 2001 to 20.5 percent in 2023 (Figure 5).

The share of those of Māori ethnicity who said they can hold a conversation in te reo Māori remained relatively stable between 2013 (21.3) and 2023 (20.5) (Table 5). While the proportion has remained stable, due to the growing Māori population, over the past ten years, the number of people of Māori ethnicity who said they can hold a conversation in te reo Māori has increased by 56,541 people (Table 9).

### Māori descent

The share of those of Māori descent who said they can hold a conversation in te reo Māori remained relatively stable between 2013 (18.4) and 2023 (18.6). While the proportion has remained stable, due to the growing Māori population, over the past ten years, the number of people of Māori descent who said they can hold a conversation in te reo Māori has increased by 59,670 people (Table 9).

In 2013, 11 percent of Ngāi Tahu of Māori descent could hold a conversation in te reo. At the 2023 Census, this had increased to 12 percent.

Table 5 The proportion of people of Māori ethnicity who could hold a conversation in te reo Māori, 2001–2023 (%)

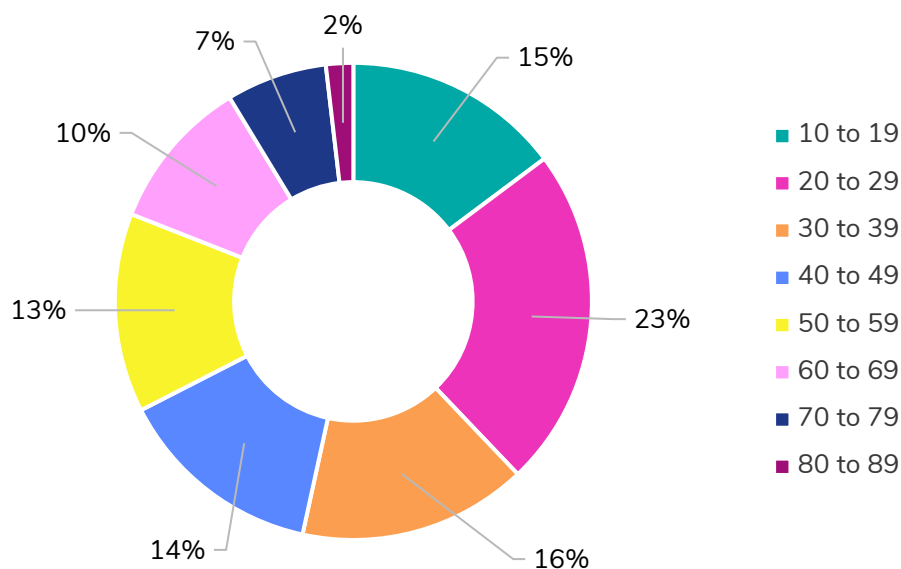
	2001	2006	2013	2018	2023
Speaks te reo (%)	25.2	23.7	21.3	20.5	20.5
Does not speak te reo (%)	74.8	76.3	78.7	79.5	79.5
Māori population count	526,281	565,329	598,602	775,843	887,493
Count of Māori speakers	132,623	133,983	127,503	163,764	184,044

Source: BERL analysis, Census 2001, 2006, 2013, 2018, and 2023. MSD, and Statistics New Zealand IDI

### 3.3 Over half of te reo Māori speakers are aged under 34 years old

In the 2018 Te Kupenga survey, 1,623 people or 19 percent (out of 8,328 aged between 10 and 89) said they could speak te reo Māori either very well, well, or fairly well. Out of these 1,623 people, 15 percent were aged 10–19 years old, 23 percent were aged 20–29 years old, 16 percent were aged 30–39 years old, 14 percent were aged 40–49 years old, 13 percent were aged 50–59 years old, ten percent were 60–69 years old, seven percent were aged 70–79 years old, and two percent were aged 80–89 years old (Figure 6). Effectively, the 2018 Te Kupenga survey found that 54 percent of te reo Māori speakers are aged between 10–39 years old, and 52 percent of survey respondents were aged between 10–39 years old.

Figure 6 Ability to speak te reo Māori fairly well, well, or very well, by age group, 2018 Te Kupenga



Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey, Statistics New Zealand IDI

n=1,623

Table 6 and Table 7 allow for a comparison of the Te Kupenga results to the Census results.

**Table 6 Proportion of each age group who can kōrero te reo Māori, Survey 2018 (%)**

Te reo skill	10–19	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70–79	80–89
Very well	4	4	4	4	3	6	10	17
Well	3	5	4	4	3	3	4	0
Fairly well	13	11	13	11	11	10	10	11
Not very well	34	36	36	33	30	28	20	17
Words or phrases	46	44	44	49	53	53	56	56
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Number of people</b>	<b>1,206</b>	<b>1,857</b>	<b>1,233</b>	<b>1,275</b>	<b>1,281</b>	<b>909</b>	<b>459</b>	<b>108</b>

Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey, Statistics New Zealand IDI

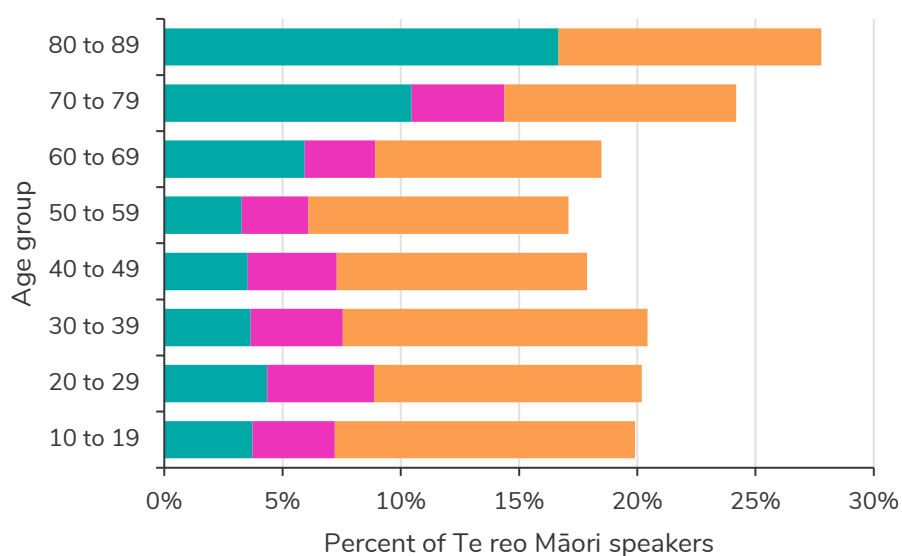
n=8,328

**Table 7 Proportion of te reo Māori speakers in the Māori ethnic population, by age group, Census 2001–2023 (%)**

Census year	< 15	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65–74	75+	Total
2001	20	25	23	25	30	44	54	56	25
2006	18	23	24	24	28	36	47	52	24
2013	17	20	23	22	23	27	37	44	21
2018	16	19	22	23	22	24	28	38	21
2023	17	19	22	24	22	22	23	30	20

Source: BERL analysis, Statistics New Zealand IDI, Census 2001, 2006, 2013, 2018, and 2023, Ministry of Social Development

**Figure 7 Proportion of each age group who can kōrero te reo Māori (%)**



Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey, Statistics New Zealand IDI

n=8,328

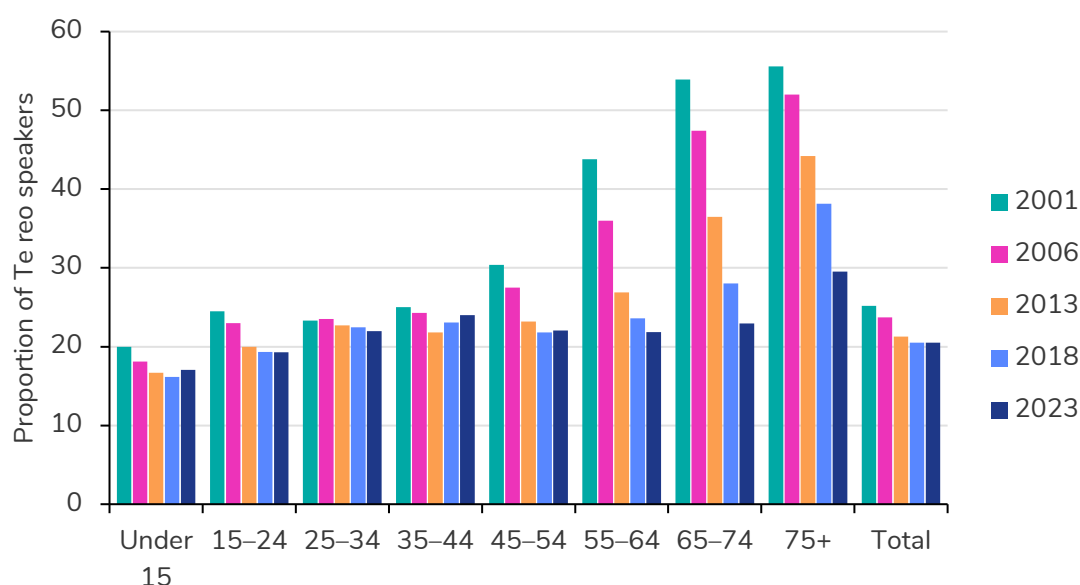
According to the 2023 Census results, someone aged 75 and above is 1.5 times more likely to speak te reo than someone aged 15–24 years. However, due to the growing Māori population overall, there are currently 30,113 people of Māori ethnicity aged 15–24 who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, 10,338 people aged 65–74, and 5,799 people aged 75 or above (Table 8). Effectively, even though you are more likely to speak te reo Māori if you are older, 57 percent of the te reo Māori speaking population is aged under 34 years old.

**Table 8 People of Māori ethnicity who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, 2001–2023**

Census	<15	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65–74	75+	Total
2001	39,297	22,449	18,503	17,795	13,549	11,115	7,015	2,577	132,300
2006	36,186	23,301	18,227	18,436	15,428	11,319	7,901	3,360	133,984
2013	33,786	21,400	16,206	16,033	15,747	11,914	8,098	4,420	127,604
2018	40,201	25,940	23,912	19,847	18,933	15,425	9,269	5,798	159,325
2023	44,772	30,113	28,973	23,684	20,672	17,506	10,338	5,799	181,858
Increase 2001–2023	14%	34%	57%	33%	53%	57%	47%	125%	37%

Source: BERL analysis, Census 2001, 2006, 2013, 2018, and 2023, Ministry of Social Development

**Figure 8 Proportion of te reo Māori speakers in the Māori ethnic population, by age group, 2001–2023 (%)**



Source: BERL analysis, Census 2001, 2006, 2013, 2018, and 2023. MSD, and Statistics New Zealand IDI

Table 9 shows that at the 2013 Census, 11.2 percent of Ngāi Tahu people could hold a conversation in te reo Māori. By the 2023 Census, this had increased to 12.1 percent. Across the Census, less than one percent of Māori and Ngāi Tahu people can speak a third language other than Māori or

English. While 12.1 percent of Ngāi Tahu of Māori descent could hold a conversation in te reo at the 2023 Census, a higher proportion of Ngāi Tahu of Māori ethnicity could hold a conversation in te reo (13.8 percent). Māori descent is based on whakapapa or biological lineage and refers to a person's genealogical descent. Statistics New Zealand states "a person has Māori descent if they are of Māori race of New Zealand; this includes any descent of such a person. This definition requires people to know their biological ancestry". While Māori ethnicity is a (self-identified cultural affiliation).

**Table 9 Proportion of Māori descent and Ngāi Tahu iwi who could hold a conversation in te reo (%)**

	2013		2023	
	All Māori	Ngāi Tahu	All Māori	Ngāi Tahu
Māori only	1.1	0.5	1.0	0.4
Māori and English only (not NZ Sign Language)	16.2	9.7	16.5	10.8
Māori, English, and NZ Sign Language (not other)	0.3	0.2	0.4	0.3
Māori, English, and other (not NZ Sign Language)	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.6
Māori, English, NZ Sign Language and other	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Other combination of Māori, English, NZ Sign Language, and other	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Total Māori (%)</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>18.6</b>	<b>12.1</b>
<b>Total people</b>	<b>122,427</b>	<b>6,105</b>	<b>182,097</b>	<b>10,305</b>

Source: BERL analysis, Census 2013 and 2023

Table 10 shows that the age group with the largest proportion of people who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori is the 75 or above age group, followed by the 65–74 age group. Back in 2001, those aged 75 plus were 2.2 times more likely to speak te reo Māori than those age 15–24. By 2023, this gap had reduced significantly, with those aged 75 or above being 1.6 times more likely to speak te reo Māori than those age 15–24.

Table 10 shows that in 2023, the age group of Ngāi Tahu people who are most likely to speak te reo is aged 35–44 (16.9 percent). In contrast to the national average, where those aged 75 or above are mostly likely to speak te reo, when it comes to Ngāi Tahu those aged 75 or above are the least likely (9.4 percent).



Table 10 Proportion of te reo Māori speakers in the Māori ethnic population, by age group and sex, Census 2001–2023 (%)

Census	Under 15	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65–74	75+	Total
<b>Tane</b>									
2001	18.9	22.9	23.6	25.5	31.7	45.3	55.3	55.1	24.6
2006	17.2	21.5	23	24.5	28	37.8	48.8	52.4	23.1
2013	15.9	18.7	20.9	21.3	23.4	27.5	38.2	44.3	20.4
2018	15.5	17.8	20.4	21.2	21.4	23.7	28.9	38.0	19.4
2023	16.5	17.4	19.9	21.4	20.8	21.7	23.3	30.1	19.1
<b>Wahine</b>									
2001	21.2	26	23.1	24.5	29.2	42.5	52.5	55.9	25.7
2006	18.9	24.5	23.9	24.1	27.1	34.3	46.2	51.8	24.4
2013	17.5	21.2	24.2	22.3	23	26.4	34.9	44.2	22.1
2018	16.9	20.9	24.4	24.8	22.2	23.5	27.3	38.2	21.6
2023	17.7	21.2	24.3	26.4	23.3	22.0	22.7	29.0	21.8
<b>Total</b>									
2001	20	24.5	23.3	25	30.4	43.8	53.9	55.6	25.2
2006	18.1	23	23.5	24.3	27.5	36	47.4	52	23.7
2013	16.7	20	22.7	21.8	23.2	26.9	36.5	44.2	21.3
2018	16.2	19.3	22.5	23.1	21.8	23.6	28.0	38.1	20.5
2023	17.1	19.3	22.0	24.0	22.1	21.9	22.9	29.5	20.5
<b>Ngāi Tahu</b>									
2013	10.3	11.7	13.5	12.2	11.0	10.7	9.3	10.2	11.2
2023	12.1	14.3	15.2	16.9	14.6	13.7	12.1	9.4	13.8

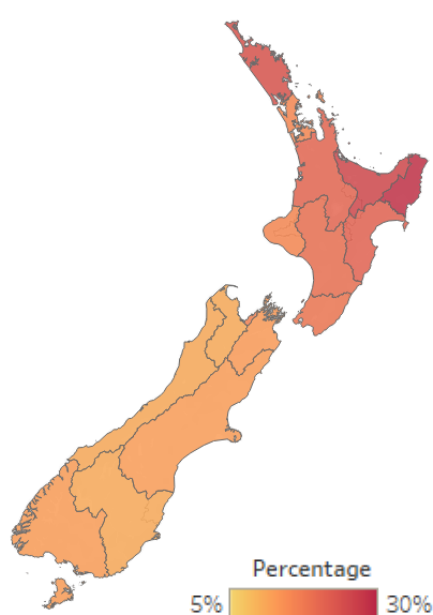
Source: BERL analysis, Statistics New Zealand IDI, Census 2001, 2006, 2013, 2018, and 2023, Ministry of Social Development

## 4 Regional overview analysis

### 4.1 Māori in the North Island are more proficient in te reo Māori

Eighty-five percent of the Māori population live in the North Island, while 15 percent live in the South Island. With this context in mind, 91 percent of those who can speak te reo either very well, well, or fairly well live in the North Island, while the other nine percent live in the South Island.

Figure 9 Ability to hold a conversation in te reo Māori, by region



When we compare Māori living in the North Island to Māori living in the South Island, there is a sharp contrast between te reo proficiency between the two islands. As Table 12 shows, Māori in the North Island are over twice as likely to speak, understand, read, and write te reo Māori very well or well in comparison to those in the South Island. For Māori in the South Island, 11 percent say they can speak te reo either very well or well (four percent), or fairly well (eight percent). In comparison, 19 percent of Māori in the North Island say they can speak te reo either very well or well (eight percent), or fairly well (11 percent) (Table 12).

Broken down by sex, South Island te reo Māori speakers (very well–fairly well) are 62 percent wahine, and 37 percent are tāne (Table 11). According to the 2023 Census, 49 percent of South Island’s general Māori population is wāhine. For South Island tāne, 11 percent can speak te reo (very well–fairly well), while 15 percent of South Island wāhine can speak te reo – making South Island wāhine 1.4 times more likely to speak te reo than tāne.

Table 11 Māori in the South Island, ability to speak te reo Māori by sex, 2018 (%)

Proficiency	Tāne		Wāhine	
	Count	%	Count	%
Excellent	36	4	51	5
Fairly well	63	7	108	10
Not well	825	89	891	85
<b>Total</b>	<b>924</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,050</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: 2018 Te Kupenga survey, Statistics New Zealand IDI

Table 12 Te reo proficiency by region, Census 2013–2023, and Te Kupenga survey 2013–2018

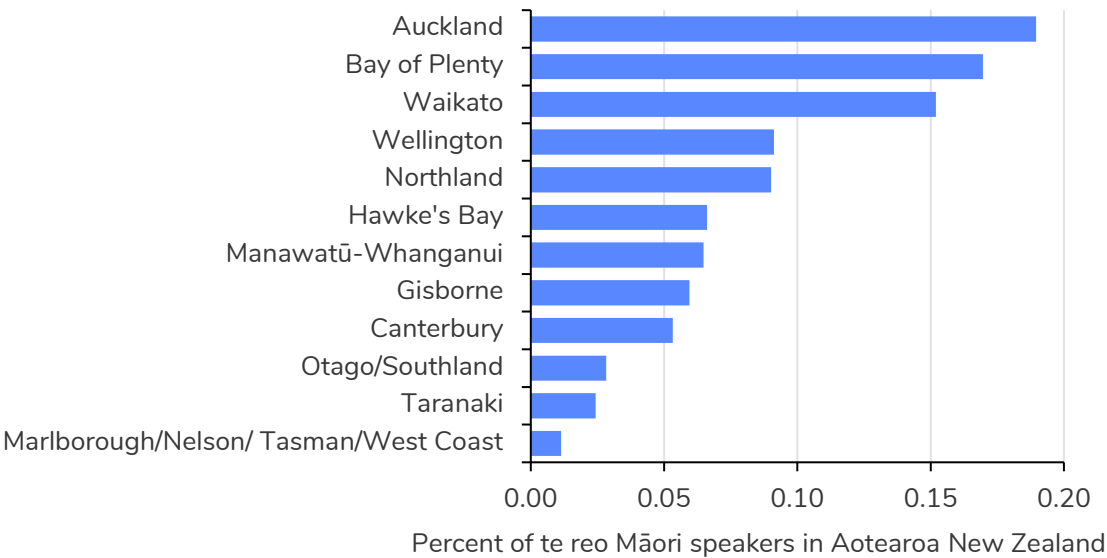
Region/health district	Census 2013	Census 2023	Te Kupenga 2013			Te Kupenga 2018		
	Hold a conversation		Fairly–very well	Not well	Words or phrases	Fairly–very well	Not well	Words or phrases
Northland	24	23	33	26	41	20	32	48
Auckland	15	16	21	29	50	14	27	59
· Waitematā	13	14						
· Auckland	14	15						
· Counties Manukau	18	18						
Waikato	20	20	20	39	41	20	32	48
Bay of Plenty	26	25	27	29	44	27	33	40
Gisborne	29	29	27	36	36	35	29	35
Hawke's Bay	22	21	27	36	36	21	37	42
Taranaki	15	15	23	34	43	14	37	49
Manawatū–Whanganui	19	19	23	34	43	17	34	50
Wellington	18	18	26	34	43	17	31	53
Tasman	10	10						
Nelson	15	16						
Marlborough	12	12						
West Coast	9	11						
Marlborough/Nelson/ Tasman/West Coast						8	29	60
Canterbury	12	12	14	28	59	12	26	62
Otago	11	11						
Southland	12	12						
Otago/Southland						10	28	62
Rest of the South Island			14	34	51			
<b>North Island</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>South Island</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Ngāi Tahu</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>						
<b>All Aotearoa</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>52</b>

Source: BERL analysis, Census 2013 and 2023, Te Kupenga survey 2013 and 2023

Table 12 Shows the te reo Māori proficiency across the 2013 Census, 2023 Census, 2013 Te Kupenga survey, and the 2018 Te Kupenga survey. The results show that the difference between the questions that were asked can influence the results quite substantially. Another factor that may have influenced the results is the small sample size of the survey, especially the 2013 survey, in comparison to the Census. For example, at the 2013 Census, 18 percent of New Zealanders of Māori descent said that they can hold a conversation in te reo. However, in the 2013 Te Kupenga survey, 22.6 percent said that they are ‘able to speak te reo Māori in day-to-day conversation’ either very well, well, or fairly well. The 2018 Te Kupenga survey increased its sample size from 5,500 people in 2013 to 8,500 in 2018. Again, at both the 2013 and 2023 Censuses, 18 percent and 19 percent of Māori could hold a conversation in te reo Māori. However, at the 2013 Te Kupenga survey, 23 percent of respondents said they were able to speak te reo Māori in day-to-day conversation either very well, well, or fairly well. In contrast, at the 2018 Te Kupenga survey, when the sample size was increased, 18 percent (in line with both censuses) said that they were able to speak te reo Māori in day-to-day conversation either very well, well, or fairly well.

The results for Ngāi Tahu people across both the 2013 and 2018 Censuses show that their overall te reo proficiency is consistently in line with that of Māori in the South Island.

Figure 10 Where Aotearoa New Zealand's te reo speakers live, by region (%)



Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey

n= 1,513

Figure 10 shows that the three regions of Auckland, Bay of Plenty, and Waikato, which are collectively home to over half of Aotearoa New Zealand's total population, are also, unsurprisingly, home to 51 percent of Māori te reo speakers. Meanwhile, in the South Island, five percent of te reo speakers are in Canterbury, three percent in Otago/Southland, and one percent across the remaining South Island regions.

**Table 13 Te reo Māori proficiency (self-rated), North Island and Māori in the South Island (%)**

	North Island	South Island
<b>Able to speak te reo Māori:</b>		
Very well/well	8	4
Fairly well	11	8
Not very well	31	27
No more than a few words or phrases	50	62
<b>Able to understand spoken te reo Māori:</b>		
Very well/well	14	7
Fairly well	19	13
Not very well	27	23
No more than a few words or phrases	41	57
<b>Able to read te reo Māori, with understanding:</b>		
Very well/well	13	6
Fairly well	15	11
Not very well	26	23
No more than a few words or phrases	45	60
<b>Able to write te reo Māori:</b>		
Very well/well	10	4
Fairly well	10	8
Not very well	27	22
No more than a few words or phrases	53	67

Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey

n = 8,500

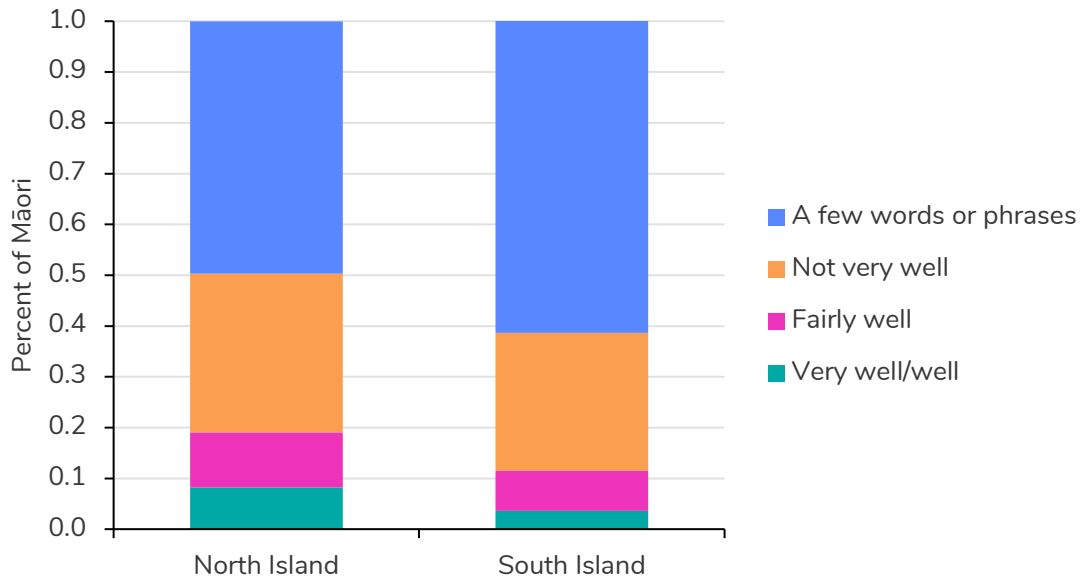
### Ability to speak te reo

As shown in Figure 11, Māori in the North Island are:

- 2.3 times more likely to speak te reo Māori very well or well
- 2.1 times more likely to understand spoken te reo Māori very well or well
- 2.3 times more likely to read te reo Māori, with understanding very well or well
- 2.7 times more likely to write te reo Māori very well or well

- This research therefore aims to understand what is driving this disparity alongside what factors are contributing to Māori in the South Island becoming proficient in te reo Māori.

Figure 11 Ability to speak te reo Māori, by North Island and South Island (%)



Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey

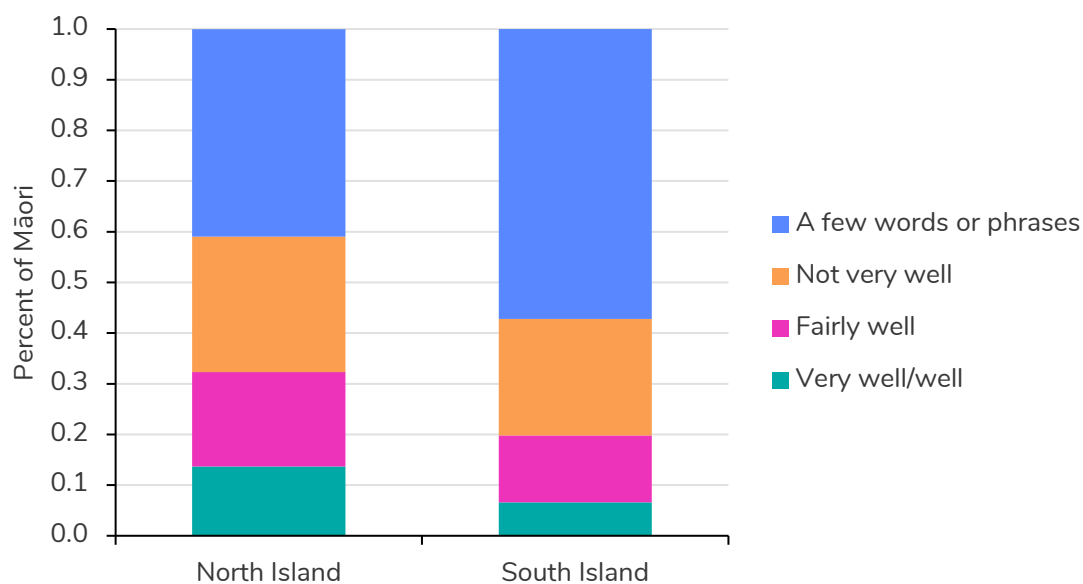
n=8,500

### Ability to understand spoken te reo

As shown in Figure 12, for Māori in the South Island:

- Seven percent can understand spoken te reo Māori either very well or well (compared to four percent who can speak te reo)
- 13 percent can understand spoken te reo Māori fairly well (compared to eight percent who can speak te reo)
- 23 percent can understand spoken te reo Māori but not very well (compared to 27 percent who can speak te reo but not very well (Figure 11)
- 57 percent can understand no more than a few words or phrases of spoken te reo Māori (compared to 62 percent who can speak who can speak no more than a few words or phrases in te reo).

Figure 12 Ability to understand spoken te reo Māori, by North Island and South Island (%)



Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey

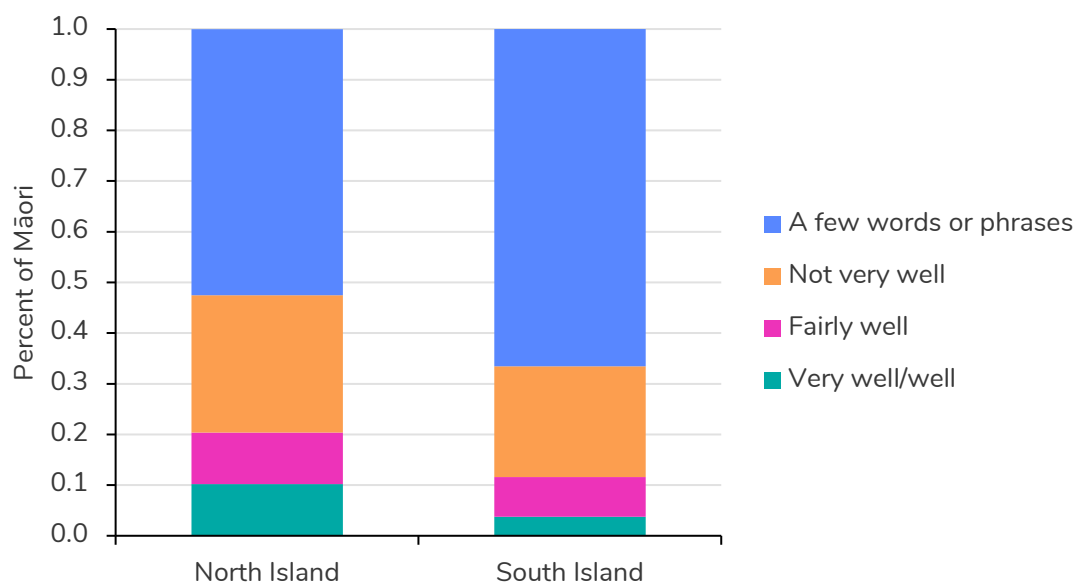
n=8,500

### Ability to write te reo

As shown in Figure 13, for Māori in the South Island:

- Four percent can write te reo Māori either very well or well (compared to four percent who can speak te reo)
- Eight percent can write te reo Māori fairly well (compared to eight percent who can speak te reo fairly well)
- 22 percent can write te reo Māori but not very well (compared to 27 percent who can speak te reo but not very well)
- 67 percent can write no more than a few words or phrases of te reo Māori (compared to 62 percent who can speak no more than a few words or phrases in te reo (Figure 11).

Figure 13 Ability to write te reo Māori, by Māori in the North and South Island (%)



Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey

n=8,500

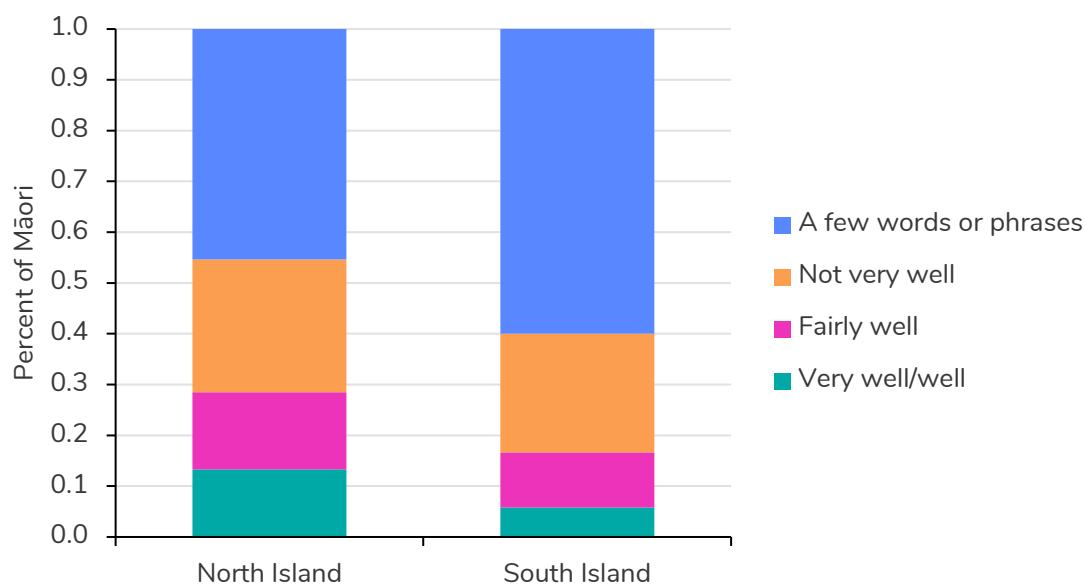
#### Able to read te reo Māori, with understanding

As shown in Figure 14, for Māori in the South Island:

- Six percent can read te reo Māori either very well or well (compared to four percent who can read te reo)
- 11 percent can read te reo Māori Fairly well (compared to eight percent who can write te reo)
- 23 percent can read te reo Māori not very well (compared to 22 percent who can write te reo)
- 60 percent can read no more than a few words or phrases of te reo Māori (compared to 67 percent who can write te reo).



Figure 14 Ability to read te reo Māori, with understanding, by North Island and South Island (%)



Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey

n=8,500

## 4.2 Rural Māori are more likely to be proficient in te reo Māori

Eighty-one percent of Māori live in urban areas, while the remaining 19 percent live in rural areas.

Table 14 shows that rural Māori are slightly more likely than urban Māori to speak, understand, read, and write te reo Māori. Rural Māori were:

- 20 percent more likely to speak te reo Māori
- Nine percent more likely understand spoken te reo Māori
- 11 percent more likely read te reo Māori, with understanding
- 12 percent more likely, to write te reo Māori.

Table 14 Te reo Māori proficiency for urban and rural Māori (%)

	Urban	Rural
<b>Able to speak te reo Māori:</b>		
Very well / fairly well	17.2	20.7
Not very well / few words or phrases	82.7	79.4
<b>Able to understand spoken te reo Māori:</b>		
Very well / fairly well	29.9	32.7
Not very well – few words or phrases	70.1	67.3
<b>Able to read te reo Māori, with understanding:</b>		
Very well / fairly well	26.2	29.0
Not very well – few words or phrases	73.9	71.0
<b>Able to write te reo Māori:</b>		
Very well / fairly well	18.8	21.0
Not very well / few words or phrases	81.2	79.1

Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey

n=8,500

Rural Māori are also slightly more likely (1.2 times) than urban Māori to believe that everyday te reo use is very important (Table 15). Just under one-third of urban and rural Māori believe that everyday te reo use is either very important or quite important. Additionally, 27 percent of urban and rural Māori believe that everyday te reo use is ‘not at all important’, while 40 percent see it as ‘somewhat important or a little important’.

Table 15 The importance of using te reo Māori themselves in daily life, all Māori (%)

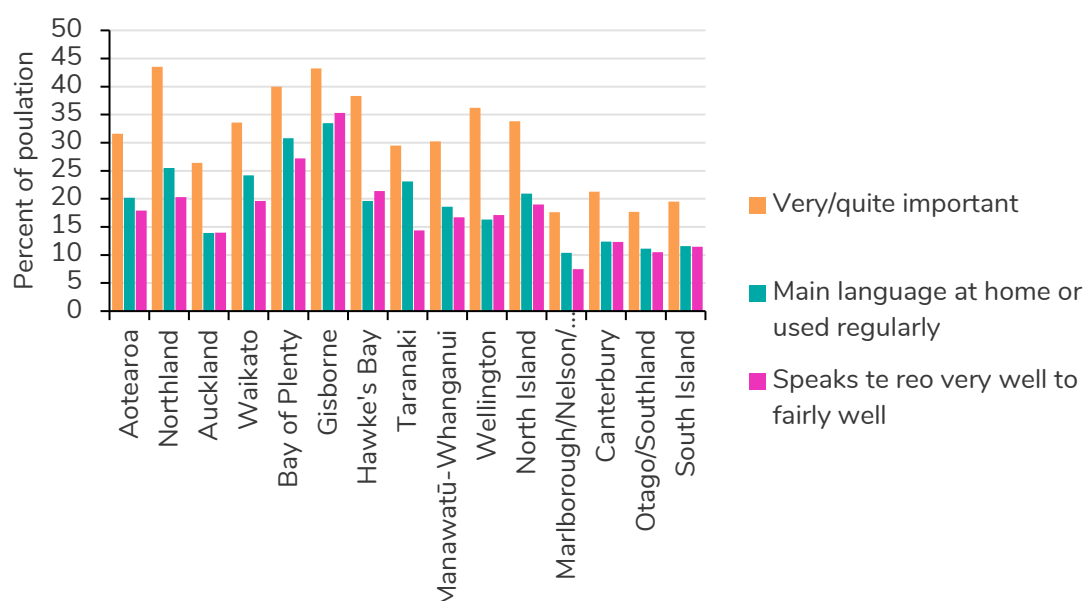
	Urban	Rural	South Island	North Island
Very important	15.3	17.8	8.5	17.0
Quite important	16.1	14.9	11.0	16.8
Somewhat/a little important	41.3	40.4	41	41.2
Not at all important	27.3	26.9	39.2	25.0

Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey

n=8,500

Rural Māori are 20 percent less likely to acquire te reo at a university or polytechnic, and ten percent less likely to acquire te reo at a wānanga, work, community-based course, Kōhanga Reo, kura kaupapa Māori, or wharekura, or other primary, secondary or Māori boarding school. On the flip side, they are more likely (ten percent) to acquire te reo Māori by listening and speaking to parents or other people living at home or with relatives, friends, or neighbours not living with them.

Figure 15 Comparison of te reo Māori proficiency, spoken at home, and perception of the importance of te reo Māori (%)



Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey

n=8,500

As shown in Table 16, nationwide, there are 425,936 people (equivalent to 55 percent of the Māori descent population), who believe that it is at least somewhat important to use te reo Māori themselves in daily life, but who cannot speak te reo very well or no more than a few words or phrases. Included in this total, are 106,290 people (13.7 percent of the Māori descent population) who think it is either quite or very important to use te reo Māori themselves in daily life but cannot speak te reo very well. These results show that it requires more than the willingness of individuals to speak and understand te reo Māori in order to become proficient and to grow te reo. The findings of this report show that there is both a need and a demand for accessible infrastructure for Māori to learn te reo and for places to go to both frequently and informally to use te reo.

Table 16 The importance of using te reo Māori vs. ability to speak te reo for those of Māori descent (weighted)

Importance of using te reo Māori		Ability to speak te reo Māori	
Very important	121,807	Very well/well	58,188
Quite important	123,359	Fairly well	80,687
Somewhat/a little important	319,646	Not very well	237,407
Not at all important	211,028	No more than a few words or phrases	399,558
Sum	775,840	Sum	775,840

Source: BERL analysis, Te Kupenga 2018 survey, Census 2018

Table 17 Comparison of te reo Māori spoken at home, ability to speak te reo, and importance of te reo, by region (%)

	Te reo Māori spoken at home	Ability to speak te reo Māori		Importance of using te reo Māori themselves in daily life		
		Very well/fairly well	Not very well	Very important	Quite important	Somewhat important
Aotearoa New Zealand	20	17.9	30.6	15.7	15.9	41.2
Northland	25	20.3	31.9	23.9	19.6	38.2
Auckland	13	14	27.3	13.2	13.2	44.2
Waikato	24	19.6	32.4	16.7	16.9	43.6
Bay of Plenty	30	27.2	33.2	21.7	18.3	36.1
Gisborne	33	35.3	29.3	25.4	17.8	41.2
Hawke's Bay	19	21.4	36.8	16.1	22.2	42
Taranaki	23	14.4	37.1	14	15.5	40.8
Manawatū–Whanganui	18	16.7	33.7	13.9	16.3	41.6
Wellington	16	17.1	30.5	17.1	19.1	37.5
North Island	20	19.0	31.2	17.0	16.8	41.2
Marlborough/Nelson/Tasman/West Coast	10	7.5	29	7.4	10.2	39.3
Canterbury	12	12.3	26	8.8	12.5	41.1
Otago/Southland	11	10.5	27.5	8.5	9.2	42.8
South Island	11	11.5	23.0	8.5	11.0	41.3

Source: BERL analysis, Te Kupenga 2018 survey, Statistics New Zealand IDI

n=8,500

## 5 What factors influence te reo Māori proficiency?

A complex web and network of variables drives proficiency in te reo Māori. However, as mentioned, the key variable required is being around other te reo Māori speakers. In this section, we analyse Te Kupenga data which allows us to conduct an in-depth analysis of the drivers of te reo Māori proficiency.

From the data we have identified the key drivers of proficiency. They are:

- If te reo Māori is a person's first language
- Density
- Urban or rural locations
- Connection to and involvement with te ao Māori
- Access to and enrolment in Māori immersion schooling or te reo Māori courses.

### 5.1 High proficiency if your first language is te reo Māori

Overall, being introduced to te reo as a first language is a significant contributor to being fluent in te reo; however, it is not the only contributor. While 56 percent of fluent Māori in the South Island learned it as a first language, 43 percent did not despite still becoming fluent in te reo (Table 18).

**Table 18 First language/s learned and still understood (%)**

	North Island	South Island	Rural	Urban	Aotearoa New Zealand
Te reo Māori	16	10	15	15	15
English	97	98	97	96	97
Other	0.4	0	1	0	1

Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey

n=8,500

As shown in Table 18, 15 percent of Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand learned (and still understand) te reo as their first language, 16 percent of Māori in the North Island learned te reo as their first language and still understand it today. In comparison, ten percent of Māori in the South Island learned te reo as their first language and still understand it today. This makes Māori in the North Island 1.6 times more likely than Māori in the South Island to have learned te reo as a first language. Rural and urban Māori are equally likely to have learned te reo as a first language (15 percent).

Table 19 The proportion of those who speak te reo as a first language, by fluency (%)

	South Island			North Island		
	Excellent	Fairly well	Not well	Excellent	Fairly well	Not well
Māori only	23	5	0.3	24	8	1
Māori and English	33	32	6.5	42	30	8
Only English	43	63	93	34	62	91

Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey

n=8,500

Another notable finding is that, nationwide, around 40 percent of those who learned te reo as a first language, self-rated their ability to speak te reo as 'not very well', 35 percent said very well, and 25 percent said fairly well.

## 5.2 High proficiency if you live in an area with a dense Māori population

The five regions with the highest proportion of Māori are Gisborne (54 percent), Northland (36 percent), Bay of Plenty (29 percent), Hawke's Bay (28 percent), and Waikato (24 percent) (Table 20).

These five regions are also the top five regions for te reo fluency: Gisborne (21 percent), Bay of Plenty (12 percent), Hawke's Bay (11 percent), Northland (nine percent), and Waikato (eight percent). This implies that the more Māori are around to kōrero with, the more proficient Māori are in te reo. This is backed up by the finding that although Auckland has the largest number of Māori (23 percent of the Māori population live in Auckland), Auckland has the smallest proportion of fluent te reo speakers in the North Island. Additionally, only three percent of Māori live in Gisborne, but they make up 54 percent of the region and have the highest proportion of fluent te reo speakers.

Table 20 presents this information by each regional council in Aotearoa New Zealand. Table 20 helps to show that the regions with the highest proportion of Māori are usually also the regions with the highest te reo Māori proficiency, regardless of how Māori are distributed across the country. For example, while only 3 percent of all Māori living in New Zealand live in Gisborne, over half of Gisborne population are Māori. Alongside Gisborne's high Māori demographic, it is also the region with the highest rate of te reo Māori proficiency as 35 percent of Māori living in Gisborne can speak te reo Māori either very well, well, or fairly well.

Column A of Table 20 presents the percent of each region that is of Māori ethnicity. For example, 54 percent of people living in Gisborne are Māori. Column B tells us that three percent of all Māori in

New Zealand live in Gisborne. Column C (very well/well) and column D (fairly well) tell us what percent of Māori living in each region can speak te reo Māori.

**Table 20 Relationship between density of Māori and proficiency of te reo Māori (%)**

Regional council area	(a) Share of Māori in regions population	(b) Share of Aotearoa New Zealand Māori population	(c) Very well/well	(d) Fairly well
Gisborne	54	3	21	14
Northland	36	8	9	11
Bay of Plenty	29	12	12	15
Hawke's Bay	28	6	11	11
Waikato	24	14	8	12
Manawatū–Whanganui	23	7	7	9
Taranaki	20	3	6	8
Wellington	14	9	7	11
Auckland	12	23	5	9
Marlborough/Nelson/Tasman/West Coast	11	3	0	8
Otago/Southland	11	4	4	7
Canterbury	10	7	4	9
<b>North Island</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>South Island</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Aotearoa New Zealand</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>10.4</b>

Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey, Statistics New Zealand

n=8,500

Auckland has the third lowest proportion of fluent te reo speakers (5.4 percent). However, if you zoom down closer into Auckland's suburbs, you will find pockets of high Māori populations, and high te reo Māori proficiency.

The two Auckland Local Board Areas (LBAs) of Manurewa and Māngere-Ōtāhuhu have te reo Māori proficiency of 22 percent and 21 percent, respectively (Table 21). This puts them in line with Gisborne's te reo proficiency of 21 percent. Manurewa has the largest Māori population in Auckland, while Māngere-Ōtāhuhu's Māori ethnic population is much lower at 17 percent.

Table 21 The top five Auckland LBAs for te reo Māori proficiency, and ethnic demographics, 2023 (%)

	Speaks te reo	Pākehā	Māori	Pacific Peoples
Manurewa	22	25	25	40
Māngere-Ōtāhuhu	21	19	17	60
Papakura	19	36	24	20
Ōtara-Papatoetoe	19	15	16	48
Henderson-Massey	19	43	18	22
<b>Aotearoa</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9</b>

The relationship between Māori density and te reo Māori proficiency suggests that the South Island can improve proficiency by leveraging small pockets of areas from which to grow and improve the proficiency of te reo Māori

**The top ten suburbs for Māori population density in the South Island are:**

1. Bluff where 46 percent (825 people) of the area are Māori
2. Paparua (Christchurch City) where 34 percent (354 people) of the area are Māori
3. Mātaura where 33 percent (540 people) of the area are Māori
4. Aranui where 32 percent (1,395 people) of the area are Māori
5. Clifton-Kew where 29 percent (537 people) of the area are Māori
6. Bexley where 27 percent (720 people) of the area are Māori
7. Georgetown where 26 percent (543 people) of the area are Māori
8. Appleby South (Invercargill City) where 25 percent (420 people) of the area are Māori
9. Heidelberg where 25 percent (522 people) of the area are Māori
10. Riversdale-Islington where 24 percent (546 people) of the area are Māori.<sup>6</sup>

Within the South Island, there are two suburbs in Christchurch City that have a te reo speaking population at least as high as Gisborne (29 percent at Census 2023), and a further 26 suburbs that are close to Gisborne's proficiency (above 20 percent at Census 2023). These areas are presented in Table 22. These finding presented in Table 22, suggest that areas with smaller Māori populations

<sup>6</sup> "Suburbs" are categorised using Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2) classifications. SA2s represent individual suburbs and communities in Aotearoa New Zealand and are built up from Statistical Area Level 1 (SA1) classifications.



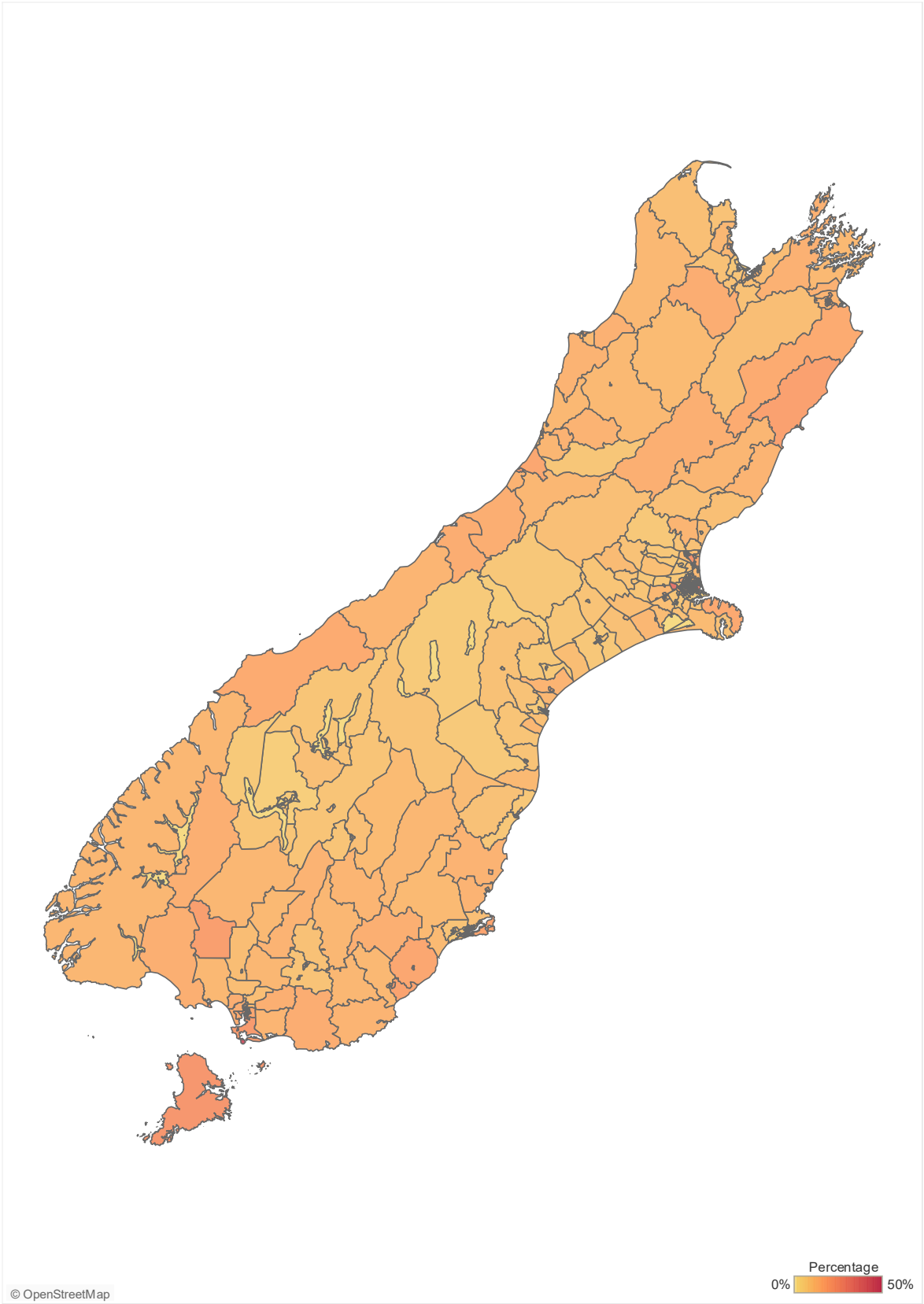
can still reap the benefits of te reo Māori fluency of living within a reasonably proximity to areas with a high Māori population. Additionally, central city areas have higher te reo proficiency, indicating that the availability of infrastructure helps provide access to te reo Māori learning.

Table 22 South Island suburbs that have high rates te reo Māori proficiency, listed by Territorial Authority (%)

	Māori ethnicity (%)	Ngāi Tahu (%)	Hold a conversation in te reo
<b>Christchurch City</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15</b>
Christchurch Central	16		40
Paparua	34		30
Charleston	16		27
Wigram South	27		27
Warren Park	26		26
Northlands	15		25
Hornby Central	15		25
Woolston West	21		23
Woolston South	13		23
Islington	18		22
Linwood North	20		22
Hoon Hay West	18		22
Brockville	18		22
Linwood East	21		21
Aranui	32		21
Lancaster Park	28		20
Bexley	27		20
<b>Nelson City</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>15</b>
Nelson Central-Trafalgar	13		25
Britannia	10		25
Washington	17		23
Atawhai	21		21
<b>Queenstown-Lakes District</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>
Queenstown Central	6		23
<b>Clutha District</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>
Benhar-Stirling	19		23
<b>Gore District</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>
Mataura	33		22
Gore South	15		20
<b>Dunedin City</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>
Brockville	18		22
Otago Peninsula	17		21
<b>Ashburton District</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>
Ashburton East	7		21
<b>Hurunui District</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>
Hanmer Range	14		20

Source: BERL analysis, Statistics New Zealand

Figure 16 Māori population density for South Island suburbs, Census 2023



Source: Statistics New Zealand



## 5.3 Social activities – spaces to converse in te reo Māori

As demonstrated by the results presented in Table 23, the main social spaces that Māori speak te reo all the time or most of the time outside of the home are either at a marae, club, or interest group. The least common place for Māori to speak te reo Māori is attending sports, followed by work. Half of Māori (who can speak more than a few words or phrases in te reo Māori) across Aotearoa New Zealand speak at least some te reo at work, while the other half speak none.

**Table 23 Amount of te reo Māori spoken outside home by te reo speakers, all Māori descent (%)**

	All/mostly	Equally with English	Some	None
When visiting relatives, friends, neighbours	3	6	44	47
When working	3	4	42	50
When attending sports	2	2	27	69
When helping at school or preschool	11	6	51	33
When attending religious activities	14	7	38	41
When at club or interest group	17	9	41	34
When attending a hui/meeting	12	9	53	26
When attending other activities on a marae	18	13	57	12

Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey, Statistics New Zealand IDI

n=8,500

According to the results of the 2018 Te Kupenga survey (Table 24), Māori in the South Island are less likely to speak any te reo Māori at a social activity outside of the home in comparison to nationally, across all categories, except when attending activities on a marae.<sup>7</sup> Only four percent of Māori in the South Island said they spoke no te reo at a marae in comparison to 12 percent nationwide. Similar to the nationwide figures, the most likely place to speak te reo outside of the home, in the South Island are:

- When attending other activities on a marae (96 percent speak at least some te reo Māori here)
- When attending a hui or meeting (73 percent speak at least some te reo Māori here)
- When helping at school or preschool (63 percent speak at least some te reo Māori here)
- When at a club or interest group (57 percent speak at least some te reo Māori here)
- When attending religious activities (43 percent speak at least some te reo Māori here).

<sup>7</sup> Sample size for Māori in the South Island who answered the question “amount of te reo Māori spoken outside home – when attending other activities on a marae” is 144 people.

Table 24 breaks this information down to te reo proficiency for Māori in the South Island. The table shows that the places where those most fluent in te reo Māori speak te reo almost exclusively are:

- When attending other activities on a marae (43 percent), additionally 100 percent speak at least some te reo here
- At another club or interest group (33 percent), additionally 20 percent speak at least some te reo here
- Attending religious activities (20 percent), additionally 100 percent speak at least some te reo here
- When helping at school or preschool (18 percent), additionally 100 percent speak at least some te reo here.

Table 24 Amount of te reo Māori spoken outside home, for those who can speak te reo, South Island of Māori descent (%)

	All/mostly	Some or equally with English	None
<b>When visiting relatives, friends, or neighbours:</b>			
Very well / well	14	61	25
Fairly well	0	51	49
Not well	0	34	66
<b>When working:</b>			
Very well / well	14	57	29
Fairly well	0	52	48
Not well	0	32	68
<b>When attending sports:</b>			
Very well / well	0	35	65
Fairly well	0	23	77
Not well	0	15	85
<b>When helping at school or preschool:</b>			
Very well / well	18	82	0
Fairly well	0	71	29
Not well	0	52	48
<b>When attending religious activities:</b>			
Very well / well	20	50	30
Fairly well	0	50	50
Not Well	0	32	68
<b>When at club or interest group:</b>			
Very well / well	33	47	20
Fairly well	10	71	19
Not well	0	40	60
<b>When attending a hui/meeting:</b>			
Very well / well	22	78	0
Fairly well	0	74	26
Not well	0	63	37
<b>When attending other activities on a marae:</b>			
Very well / well	43	57	0
Fairly well	0	100	0
Not well	0	90	10

Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey, Statistics New Zealand IDI

n=786

## 5.4 Engaged in Māori culture

Table 25 shows that Māori in the South Island are slightly more likely to be registered with their iwi, but less likely to have voted in an iwi election in the past three years. Māori in the South Island who speak te reo are 1.3 times more likely to be registered with their iwi than all Māori in the South Island. Māori in the North Island who speak te reo are 1.5 times more likely to be registered with their iwi than all Māori in the North Island.

*Table 25 Participation with iwi by North Island, South Island, urban, and rural (%)*

	North Island	South Island	SI speaks te reo	NI speaks te reo	Urban	Rural
Registered with iwi	46	50	66	68	46	53
Eligible to vote in last iwi elections	78	74	NA	NA	77	79
Voted in an iwi election in the last three years (if eligible)	53	41	NA	NA	50	57
<b>Count</b>	<b>1,338</b>					

Source: BERL analysis, Statistics New Zealand IDI, and the 2018 Te Kupenga survey

n= 8,500

Table 26 shows that Māori who can speak te reo Māori are 2.5 times (South Island) and 2.6 times (North Island) more likely to believe that being engaged in Māori culture is very or quite important. This is another example of the circular nature of te reo and connectedness to Māori culture; e.g., the more a person is connected to Māori culture, the more likely they are to learn, speak, and understand te reo Māori. Similarly, if a person can speak te reo Māori, then that is an element of Māori culture that they are already connected to; therefore, they are more likely to see its value and to have access to and involvement in other facets of Māori culture. Table 26 shows that there is little to no difference in how rural Māori or urban Māori view the importance of engagement in Māori culture.

*Table 26 Importance of being engaged in Māori culture (%)*

	North Island	South Island	SI speaks te reo	NI speaks te reo	Urban	Rural
Very/quite important	48	32	79	85	45	47
Somewhat/a little important	43	53	21	15	44	44
Not at all important	10	15	0	1	11	10
<b>Count</b>	<b>261</b>		<b>1,338</b>			

Source: BERL analysis, Statistics New Zealand IDI, and the 2018 Te Kupenga survey

n= 8,500

Table 27 shows that Māori who can speak te reo are slightly more likely to know their iwi (tribe) than Māori who cannot. Table 27 also shows that there is not a significant difference between South Island, North Island, urban, and rural who know their iwi. Nationally, 86 percent of Māori who filled in the Te Kupenga survey know their iwi, meaning that 14 percent of Māori do not. This is equal to around 136,954 people (based on the 2023 Census counts for the Māori descent population). However, Māori in the North Island are 3.3 times more likely to know their full pepeha than Māori in the South Island.

**Table 27 Know pepeha (tribal identity) (%)**

	North Island	South Island	SI speaks te reo	NI speaks te reo	Urban	Rural
Iwi (tribe)	86	85	96	99	86	87
Hapū (subtribe)	57	41	88	94	54	59
Maunga (mountain)	61	46	88	96	58	62
Awa/moana (river or water)	59	43	88	96	55	60
Waka (canoe)	54	35	85	95	51	54
Tipuna/tupuna (ancestor)	57	41	82	92	53	60
None of these	11	13	2	1	12	10
All of these	42	24	NA	NA	39	44
<b>Count</b>	<b>7,208</b>	<b>1,292</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>1,335</b>	<b>6,910</b>	<b>1,589</b>

Source: BERL analysis, Statistics New Zealand IDI, and the 2018 Te Kupenga survey

n= 8,500



Table 28 Participated in cultural practice, in previous 12 months (%)

	North Island	South Island	SI speaks te reo	NI speaks te reo	Urban	Rural
Used a Māori greeting	91	83			90	91
Wore Māori jewellery	47	46			47	47
Wore Māori branded clothing	33	21			31	34
Had contact with Māori through social media	50	37			49	46
Went to a Māori festival or event	43	30	64	70	42	39
Sang a Māori song, participated in a haka, gave a mihi or speech	61	51	84	88	60	56
Took part in kapa haka as a performer	14	11	38	34	14	14
Provided unpaid help to kapa haka group or event	15	11	35	40	14	16
Took part in other Māori performing arts or crafts	15	12	40	35	15	15
Said karakia	52	32	80	92	49	50
Went to a hui	40	24			36	42
Took part in traditional Māori healing or massage	13	6			12	16
Went to other activities on a marae	35	20			31	37
Discussed or explored whakapapa or family history	60	56	75	79	59	62
Learned about Māori culture at a library, museum, or Māori website	32	32	53	48	33	30
Watched a Māori television programme	67	53			65	68
Listened to a Māori radio station	30	16			27	34
Read a Māori magazine	15	15			14	18
Taught or shared Māori culture with others	47	40	82	79	46	45
Other that involved learning the Māori language or culture	25	21	56	66	24	23
Have a tā moko (Māori tattoo) acquired at any time	19	13			18	18
<b>Count</b>			<b>261</b>	<b>1,314</b>		

Source: BERL analysis, Statistics New Zealand IDI, and the 2018 Te Kupenga survey

n= 8,500

## 5.5 Connected to marae

Table 29 shows that Māori in the North Island are slightly more likely (1.22 times) to have been to their marae tipuna in their lifetime. Māori in the North Island who speak te reo are 1.5 times more likely than Māori in the South Island who speak te reo to have visited their marae tipuna.

Table 29 Connection to marae tipuna (ancestral marae) (%)

	North Island	South Island	SI speaks te reo	NI speaks te reo	Urban	Rural
Know marae tipuna	69	50	90		65	71
<b>Been to marae tipuna (if known):</b>						
At some time	86	70	88	95	84	84
In the previous 12 months	46	23	55	84	42	53
Would like to have been to marae tipuna more often in the last 12 months	64	68	75		66	56
Consider marae tipuna (if known) as tūrangawaewae <sup>(a)</sup>	74	64	84		73	75
<b>Connection to that marae tipuna as tūrangawaewae<sup>(b)</sup>:</b>						
Feel very strongly connected	42	28	52		40	47
Feel strongly connected	24	24	25		23	24
Feel somewhat connected	23	31	19		24	20
Feel weakly / very weakly connected	10	16	5		11	9
Feel not at all connected	1	0	0		2	0
<b>Count</b>			<b>261</b>	<b>1,266</b>		

Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey, Statistics New Zealand IDI

n=8,500

a. Tūrangawaewae is a Māori concept of belonging to a place through kinship and whakapapa, where one can stand and feel they are home.

b. Only asked of those who thought of their ancestral marae as their tūrangawaewae.

## 6 Profile of Māori in the South Island who are proficient in te reo Māori

For Māori in the South Island, the leading means of acquiring te reo Māori is by teaching themselves (61 percent). In comparison, for Māori in the North Island, teaching themselves is the third leading means of acquiring te reo. This comes back again to the cyclical nature of growing a language and the key requirement of density and access. For the North Island, the leading means of acquiring te reo Māori is by listening or speaking with relatives, friends or neighbours not living with them and by speaking te reo Māori at home. Māori in the North Island are 18 percent more likely to acquire te reo Māori this way than Māori in the South Island.

Table 30 shows that nationally the most common ways that people acquire te reo Māori are by listening or speaking with relatives, friends or neighbours not living with them (68 percent), going to hui and listening to te reo Māori being spoken (63 percent), listening and speaking to parents or other people living at home (59 percent), and an English–medium primary, secondary or Māori boarding school (52 percent).

Broken down by the North Island and the South Island, close to two-thirds (61 percent) of Māori in the North Island acquire te reo by listening and speaking te reo at home. Alongside this, 70 percent of Māori in the North Island said they acquire te reo by listening or speaking with relatives, friends or neighbours not living with them. In comparison, 47 percent of Māori in the South Island acquire te reo by listening and speaking te reo at home, 59 percent acquire te reo by listening or speaking with relatives, friends, or neighbours not living with them, 54 percent learn by going to hui and listening to te reo Māori being spoken, and 58 percent learn te reo at an English–medium primary, secondary or Māori boarding school.

Table 30 Ways of acquiring te reo Māori, North Island and South Island (%)

	North Island	South Island	Aotearoa New Zealand
Listening and speaking to parents or other people living at home	61	47	59
Listening or speaking with relatives, friends or neighbours not living with them	70	59	68
Going home to your iwi or hapū area(s)	49	32	47
Kōhanga reo, kura kaupapa Māori, or wharekura	35	27	34
Other primary, secondary or Māori boarding school	51	58	52
Study at Māori wānanga <sup>8</sup>	29	27	29
Study at other tertiary institutions such as university or polytechnic	21	27	22
Going to hui and listening to te reo Māori being spoken	65	54	63
Work or community-based courses	28	25	28
Teaching themselves	62	61	62

Source: Te Kupenga 2018 survey

N=4120

Table 30 includes only those who speak more than a few words or phrases of te reo Māori.

## 6.1 The amount of te reo spoken at home

Table 31 provides valuable insights into why Māori in the North Island are 2.3 times more likely to be fluent in speaking te reo Māori than Māori in the South Island<sup>9</sup>. While nearly half (48 percent) of Māori in the North Island speak at least some te reo Māori at home with parents, close to one-third (32 percent) of Māori in the South Island speak some te reo at home with parents. However, in the South Island, Māori are more likely to speak some te reo at home with children, with almost all saying that they speak at least some te reo Māori at home with children (however, the discrepancy for Māori in the South Island in comparison to Māori in the North Island may be related to the low counts for the South Island).

<sup>8</sup> The 2018 Te Kupenga survey asked, “through study at Māori wānanga, such as Te Wānanga o Aotearoa?”. The questions presented in this table are subjective and may be interpreted differently for each respondent.

<sup>9</sup> The data from this survey question was too granular, producing too small counts, to provide meaningful response rates for Māori in the South Island fluent in te reo. However, the responses can be viewed in the context that Māori in the North Island are 2.27 times more likely to be fluent in speaking te reo Māori than Māori in the South Island.

The data suggests that people are more likely to speak some te reo Māori with young children and then begin to drop off as the children age. This may be reflected that as children grow, their te reo vocabulary expands and therefore it becomes harder for parents and adults to keep up, or for children to continue their te reo Māori development.

### **All te reo Māori or mostly te reo Māori**

Across Aotearoa New Zealand, only one percent of Māori speak all or mostly te reo Māori at home to their parents, spouse or partner (Table 31). However, when it comes to pre-school aged children this proportion increased to seven percent. This seven percent, of people who speak te reo at home to pre-school-aged children, is almost all urban communities. This proportion decreases as children age, with five percent of Māori speaking te reo almost all the time to primary school-aged children and three percent to secondary school-aged children. Alongside this, we also know from the previous Education Outcomes 2024 BERL report that “53 percent of those who participated in some Māori-medium in primary school, did not continue to a Māori-medium secondary school”.

### **Some te reo Māori**

Māori in the North Island are 1.5 times more likely to speak some te reo at home with parents (48 percent) in comparison to Māori in the South Island (32 percent). However, both North Island and Māori in the South Island are almost equally likely to speak te reo at home with a spouse or partner or adult children.

Table 31 The amount of te reo Māori spoken at home, with members of household (%)

	Aotearoa New Zealand	North Island	South Island	Urban	Rural
<b>To parents</b>					
All te reo Māori / mostly te reo Māori	1	5	5	5	5
te reo Māori equally with English*	6	4	0	7	0
Some te reo Māori	45	48	32	45	54
No te reo Māori	47	48	68	49	46
<b>To spouse/partner</b>					
All te reo Māori / mostly te reo Māori	1	0	0	1	3
te reo Māori equally with English	5	2	0	5	5
Some te reo Māori	53	53	52	52	57
No te reo Māori	41	41	46	43	35
<b>To pre-school children</b>					
All te reo Māori / mostly te reo Māori	7	2	0	7	0
te reo Māori equally with English	11	7	0	11	11
Some te reo Māori	69	81	100	68	77
No te reo Māori	13	10	0	14	12
<b>To primary school children</b>					
All te reo Māori / mostly te reo Māori	5	1	0	5	0
te reo Māori equally with English	8	5	0	8	10
Some te reo Māori	71	80	100	69	81
No te reo Māori	16	14	0	18	9
<b>To secondary school children</b>					
All te reo Māori / mostly te reo Māori	3	0	0	0	0
te reo Māori equally with English	6	0	0	5	0
Some te reo Māori	62	61	100	63	72
No te reo Māori	29	24	0	32	28
<b>To adult children</b>					
All te reo Māori / mostly te reo Māori	0	0	0	0	0
te reo Māori equally with English	7	0	0	7	0
Some te reo Māori	55	63	63	56	57
No te reo Māori	37	37	37	36	43
<b>To other children living in same household</b>					
All te reo Māori / mostly te reo Māori	2	0	0	3	0
te reo Māori equally with English	5	5	0	7	0
Some te reo Māori	47	60	35	52	58
No te reo Māori	46	35	65	38	42

Source: BERL analysis

## 6.2 Informal environment for speaking te reo Māori is important

In Table 32 we dive further into the data to see if there is anything different that fluent te reo speakers are doing in comparison to those who can speak it fairly well or not well. The data presented in the table shows that for those who can speak te reo Māori very well or well, 80 percent acquired it from listening and speaking to parents or other people living at home, or with relatives, friends, or neighbours not living with them.

The findings show that Māori in the South Island who speak te reo Māori very well or well are 1.4 times more likely than fairly well te reo Māori speakers to have learned te reo by listening and speaking to parents or other people living at home. Further, they are also 1.3 times more likely to have acquired te reo by going home to their iwi or hapū area(s), 1.4 times more likely to have acquired te reo at Kōhanga Reo, kura kaupapa Māori, or wharekura, and 1.2 times more likely to have learned te reo by studying at other tertiary institutions such as universities or polytechnics.

**Table 32 Ways of acquiring te reo Māori by proficiency, South Island (%)**

	Very well/well	Fairly well	Not well
Listening and speaking to parents or other people living at home	80	64	14
Listening or speaking with relatives, friends, or neighbours not living with them	80	67	19
Going home to your iwi or hapū area(s)	60	47	10
Kōhanga Reo, kura kaupapa Māori, or wharekura	50	36	8
Other primary, secondary or Māori boarding school	50	48	18
Study at Māori wānanga	47	45	7
Study at other tertiary institutions such as university or polytechnic	40	33	8
Going to hui and listening to te reo Māori being spoken	80	72	16
Work or community-based courses	33	40	7
Teaching yourself	83	74	19
<b>Counts</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>1719</b>

Source: BERL analysis, Statistics New Zealand IDI, and Te Kupenga 2018 survey

n=1,983

Percentages add to more than 100 because respondents can select more than one means of acquiring te reo Māori.

At a national level, of Māori that speak te reo very well/well, 61.5 percent stated that teaching themselves was a way of acquiring te reo. This held consistent by rural (61 percent) or urban (61.7 percent) living Māori. The regions where Māori are most likely to teach themselves are:

- Bay of Plenty, 66 percent
- Northland, 64 percent
- Wellington, 65 percent
- Marlborough/Nelson/Tasman/West Coast, 64 percent
- Hawke's Bay, 64 percent
- Canterbury, 63 percent
- Gisborne, 62 percent
- Waikato, 60 percent
- Auckland, 59 percent
- Taranaki, 57 percent
- Manawatū-Whanganui, 56 percent
- Otago/Southland, 56 percent.

Māori in the South Island who are fluent in te reo, in comparison to those who can speak some te reo, but 'not well', are:

- 4.3 times more likely to teach themselves
- 5.6 times more likely to acquire te reo by listening and speaking to parents or other people living at home
- 4.2 times more likely to acquire te reo by listening or speaking with relatives, friends or neighbours not living with them
- 5.0 times more likely to acquire te reo by going to hui and listening to te reo Māori being spoken
- 6.3 times more likely to acquire te reo by going home to their iwi or hapū area(s)
- 6.2 times more likely to acquire te reo by attending Kōhanga Reo, kura kaupapa Māori, or wharekura
- 2.7 times more likely to acquire te reo by attending another primary, secondary or Māori boarding school
- 6.7 times more likely to acquire te reo by studying at a Māori wānanga
- 5.3 times more likely to acquire te reo at other tertiary institutions such as universities or polytechnics
- 4.8 times more likely to acquire te reo at work or community-based courses.



Table 33 shows that those who are fluent in te reo learn it at home and by speaking it with relatives, friends, neighbours, or at hui where te reo Māori is being spoken. It paints a clear picture, that the more a language is spoken around you, the more you use it, and the more fluent you become. Kōhanga Reo, kura kaupapa Māori, or wharekura are also significant contributors to fluency in te reo Māori.

**Table 33 Ways of acquiring te reo Māori by proficiency, North Island (%)**

	Very well/well	Fairly well	Not well
Listening and speaking to parents or other people living at home	81	72	22
Listening or speaking with relatives, friends or neighbours not living with them	85	77	27
Going home to their iwi or hapū area(s)	75	60	17
Kōhanga Reo, kura kaupapa Māori, or wharekura	57	47	11
Other primary, secondary or Māori boarding school	54	54	20
Study at Māori wānanga	41	40	10
Study at other tertiary institutions such as university or polytechnic	31	24	7
Going to hui and listening to te reo Māori being spoken	83	77	24
Work or community-based courses	33	34	10
Teaching themselves	71	71	24

Source: BERL analysis, Statistics New Zealand IDI, and Te Kupenga 2018 survey

n=6,183

## 6.3 Attending Māori medium education

**Māori medium:** is when the curriculum is taught in te reo Māori for at least 51 percent of the time.

Māori language learning describes students being taught at different levels of Māori instruction.

Each level is defined by the proportion of time the student is taught using te reo Māori.

- Level 1: 81-100 percent of the curriculum is taught in Māori for between 20 and up to 25 hours a week
- Level 2: 51-80 percent of the curriculum is taught in Māori for between 12.5 and up to 20 hours a week.

As shown in Table 32 and Table 33, half of Māori in the South Island and 5 percent of Māori in the North Island who can speak te reo Māori very well or well acquired te reo at Kōhanga Reo, kura kaupapa Māori, or wharekura. Additionally, eight percent of Māori in the South Island who can

speak te reo not very well or no more than a few words or phrases acquired their limited proficiency at kura kaupapa Māori or wharekura. Of Māori who attended kura kaupapa or wharekura, 54 percent left being able to speak te reo either fairly well, well, or very well, while 46 percent left not being able to speak te reo very well. It is therefore likely that the 46 percent of Māori nationally (equal to 681 people surveyed in 2018), only attended kura kaupapa Māori or wharekura for a limited time.

**Table 34 Number of Māori medium schools, by region, and te reo Māori proficiency**

	Number of schools (counts)				Proficiency in te reo Māori (%)		
	Total Māori medium schools	Primary/intermediate	Composite/secondary	Other (year 1–10 / 7–10)	Very well/well	Fairly well	2023 Census
Bay of Plenty	65	44	20	1	12	15	25
Auckland	55	41	14		5	9	16
Waikato	50	32	17	1	8	12	20
Northland	44	26	17	1	9	11	23
Manawatū–Whanganui	28	19	9		7	9	19
Gisborne	22	13	9		21	14	29
Wellington	21	14	7		7	11	18
Hawke's Bay	19	12	7		11	11	21
Canterbury	16	12	4		3	9	12
Taranaki	7	3	4		6	8	15
Nelson	6	5	1		0	8	15
Otago	3	2	1		4	7	11
Southland	3	2	1		4	7	12
Tasman	2	2			0	8	10
Marlborough	2	2			0	8	12
West Coast	1	1			0	8	9
<b>North Island</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>South Island</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>7</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>19</b>

Source: BERL analysis, Education Counts

n = 8,500

According to the Ministry of Education's roll data for 2024, a total of 25,143 students were taught predominantly in te reo Māori. According to Education Counts, 91 percent of those students were living in the North Island, while only nine percent were in the South Island. In total, there are 33 Māori-medium schools in the South Island, only seven of which are composite schools that continue to year 13 of secondary school. Four of these schools are located in Christchurch, the other three are in Nelson, Invercargill, and Dunedin.

Table 34 shows that the regions of Aotearoa New Zealand that have the largest number of Māori medium schools are in the Bay of Plenty, Auckland, Waikato, Northland, Manawatū–Whanganui, and Gisborne.

**Table 35 Relationship between Māori medium schools per Māori ethnic population and te reo Māori ability, by region, 2023 Census**

	Māori medium schools per x Māori population	Māori	Total Māori medium schools	2023, hold a conversation (%)
Nelson	1,016	6,096	6	16
Gisborne	1,238	27,228	22	29
Bay of Plenty	1,524	99,030	65	25
Northland	1,590	69,954	44	23
Manawatū– Whanganui	2,190	61,308	28	19
Waikato	2,410	120,489	50	20
Hawke's Bay	2,546	48,369	19	21
Tasman	2,822	5,643	2	10
Auckland	3,258	179,196	55	15
Wellington	3,587	75,327	21	18
Marlborough	3,608	7,215	2	12
Taranaki	3,834	26,841	7	15
Canterbury	4,205	67,275	16	12
West Coast	4,449	4,449	1	11
Southland	5,507	16,521	3	12
Otago	7,803	23,409	3	11
<b>Aotearoa New Zealand</b>	<b>2,438</b>	<b>838,728</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>19</b>

Source: BERL analysis, Education Counts, Statistics New Zealand IDI, Census 2023

Table 35 shows there is not a definitive relationship between the number of Māori medium schools available in a region and an ability to hold a conversation in te reo Māori. Table 36 and Table 37 show that for the most part, the regions of Aotearoa New Zealand with the largest number of Māori medium schools per capita are also the regions with the largest proportion of people being able to hold a conversation in te reo. However, as shown in Table 36, Nelson is a stark outlier here. Nelson has the largest number of Māori medium schools per capita (one school per 1,016 people of Māori ethnicity), while 16 percent could hold conversation in te reo Māori at the 2023 Census (rank 8 out of 16 regions for ability to hold a conversation in te reo Māori). Nelson is the region in the South Island with the largest proportion of Māori who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori. Nelson Māori are 1.3 times more likely to be able to hold a conversation in te reo than those in Canterbury.

**Table 36 Top six regions for Māori medium schooling vs ability to speak te reo Māori, 2023**

Top six regions for Māori Medium schools per capita	Top six regions for ability to speak te reo
Nelson	Gisborne
Gisborne	Bay of Plenty
Bay of Plenty	Northland
Northland	Hawke's Bay
Manawatū–Whanganui	Waikato
Waikato	Manawatū–Whanganui

Source: BERL analysis, Census 2023

Table 36 shows (except for Nelson), the regions with the largest number of Māori medium school per capita also have the highest rates of te reo Māori. The top three regions (excluding Nelson) for Māori medium are also the same top three regions for te reo ability. Similarly, Table 37 shows that the six regions with the smallest number of Māori medium schools per capita are largely the same six regions with the lowest proportion of te reo Māori proficiency.

**Table 37 Bottom six regions for Māori medium schooling vs ability to speak te reo Māori, 2023**

Bottom six regions for Māori Medium schools per capita	Bottom six regions for ability to speak te reo
Otago	Tasman Region
Southland	Otago
West Coast	West Coast
Canterbury	Southland
Taranaki	Canterbury
Marlborough	Marlborough

Source: BERL analysis, Census 2023

The main reason why Nelson and Tasman are outliers is likely due to their small Māori ethnic group populations overall. Tasman is the region with the smallest number of people of Māori ethnicity with 5,643 Māori and two Māori medium schools, and Nelson is the second smallest with 6,096 Māori and six Māori medium schools.

## 6.4 Highest qualifications for te reo Māori speakers

Table 38 shows that those Māori in the South Island who are very fluent in te reo are slightly more likely to hold a bachelor's degree or higher qualification in comparison to the general Māori population.

Māori in the South Island who are very fluent in te reo are also slightly more likely (1.15 times) to hold a bachelor's degree or higher qualification in comparison to Māori in the North Island who are

also very fluent in te reo. Overall, in 2018 and 2023, Māori in the South Island were equally likely to hold a bachelor's degree or higher than Māori in the North Island. At the 2023 Census, 13.7 percent of both North and Māori in the South Island held a bachelor's degree or higher.

According to the 2018 Te Kupenga survey (Table 38), Māori in the South Island who are fluent in te reo are slightly less likely to have no qualifications than Māori in the North Island and All Māori.

**Table 38 Highest qualifications of Māori who are very fluent in speaking te reo, in comparison to the national population (%)**

	All Māori	All NZ	North Island te reo very well			South Island te reo very well		
			2018	2023		2018	2023	
No qualification	25	18	24	25	22	22	25	21
School qualification	43	38	30	43	45	39	45	46
Tertiary certificate or diploma	19	19	33	19	20	24	18	20
Bachelor's degree+	12	25	13	13	14	15	12	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: BERL analysis, Census 2018 and 2023, and the 2018 Te Kupenga survey

## 7 Profile of Ngāi Tahu te reo Māori speakers

According to the 2023 Census, 10,305 Ngāi Tahu (12 percent) can hold a conversation in te reo Māori. Just over half (55 percent) of Ngāi Tahu te reo speakers live in the South Island, a significant concentration (2,559 people) residing in Canterbury. Although Ngāi Tahu members are more likely to live in the South Island, those who live in the North Island are 1.5 times more likely to speak te reo Māori.

**Table 39 Proportion of Ngāi Tahu who can hold a conversation in te reo by region, Census 2023**

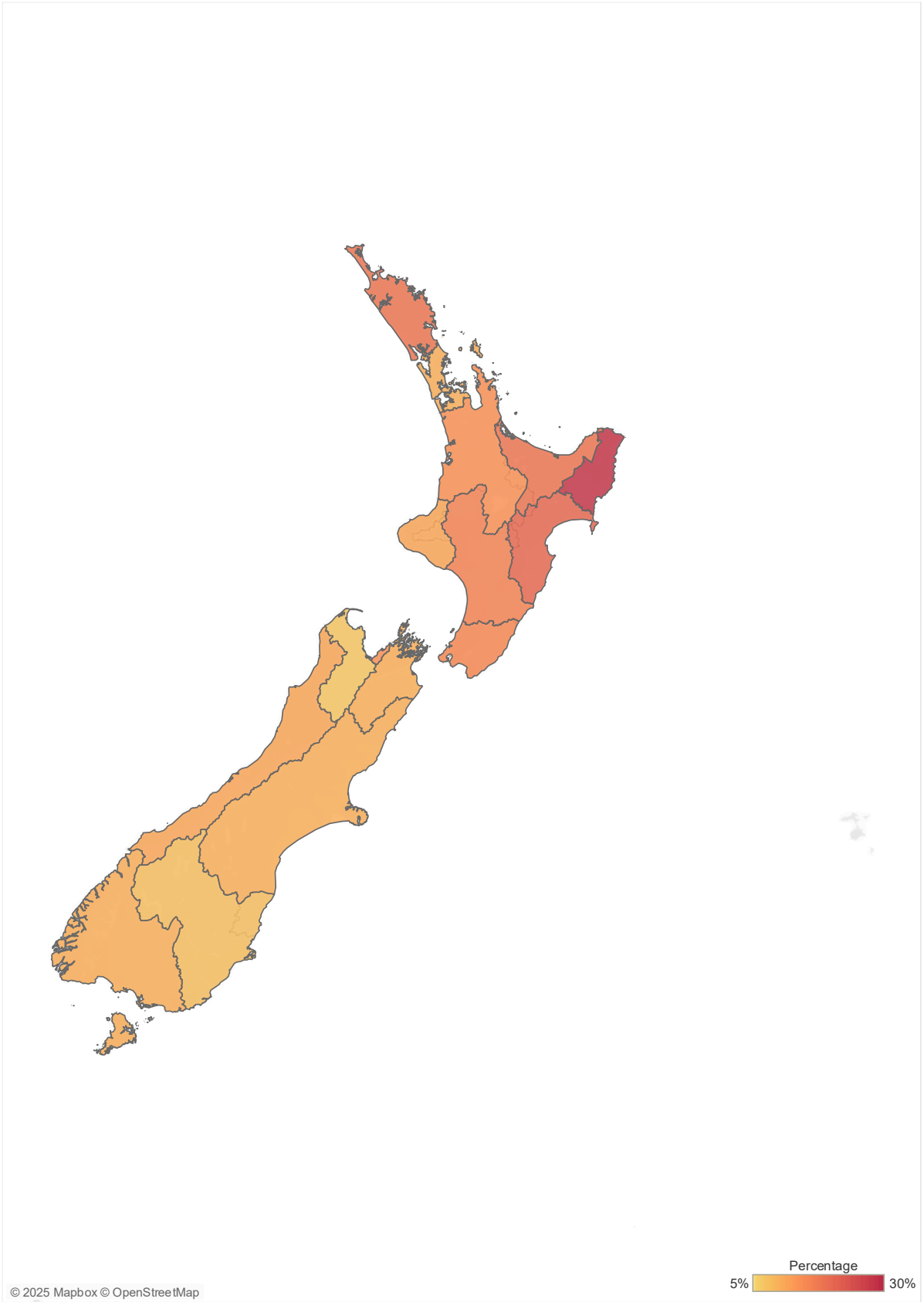
Region	Ngāi Tahu living in each region who can speak te reo		Distribution of Ngāi Tahu across Aotearoa New Zealand		
	%	Count	All %	te reo %	All
Northland	18	348	3	2	1,926
Auckland	10	939	9	11	9,036
Waikato	14	705	7	6	5,043
Bay of Plenty	18	750	7	5	4,224
Gisborne	28	282	3	1	993
Hawke's Bay	20	591	6	3	2,943
Taranaki	11	168	2	2	1,509
Manawatū–Whanganui	16	714	7	5	4,428
Wellington	15	1,194	12	10	8,088
Tasman	7	84	1	1	1,230
Nelson	14	180	2	2	1,311
Marlborough	10	207	2	3	2,142
West Coast	11	165	2	2	1,530
Canterbury	10	2,559	25	29	24,501
Otago	8	675	7	10	8,583
Southland	10	726	7	9	7,359
<b>North Island</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5,691</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>38,190</b>
<b>South Island</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4,596</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>46,656</b>
<b>Ngāi Tahu all NZ</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10,305</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>84,846</b>

Source: Census 2023, Statistics New Zealand

Much like the national-level population of Māori, Ngāi Tahu who live in regions with a high proportion of Māori are more likely to speak te reo. While only one percent of Ngāi Tahu lives in Gisborne (the region with the highest density of Māori ethnic group and te reo speakers), those who do are 2.8 times more likely to be able to hold a conversation in te reo than those who live in the South Island. Ngāi Tahu who live in Auckland are equally likely to be able to hold a conversation in te reo than those from Canterbury and the South Island.



Figure 17 Proportion of Ngāi Tahu who can hold a conversation in te reo by region, Census 2023



Source: Census 2023, Statistics New Zealand



**The top three regions** where the largest proportion of Ngāi Tahu residents who can hold a conversation in te reo are:

1. Gisborne (348 people, equal to 28 percent)
2. Bay of Plenty (750 people, equal to 18 percent)
3. Northland (282 people, equal to 18 percent).

**The bottom three regions** where the lowest proportion of Ngāi Tahu residents who can hold a conversation in te reo are:

1. Tasman (84 people, equal to 7 percent)
2. Otago (726 people, equal to 9 percent)
3. Southland (726 people), Canterbury (2,559 people), and Auckland (939 people), (each ten percent).

*Table 40 The proportion of Ngāi Tahu who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, by Canterbury districts, 2023*

Area	%	Count
Kaikoura District	10	432
Hurunui District	8	519
Waimakariri District	10	2,958
Christchurch City	12	14,196
Selwyn District	7	2,739
Ashburton District	4	1,014
Timaru District	9	2,130
Mackenzie District	8	150
Waimate District	7	261
Waitaki District	5	837
<b>Total Canterbury</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>25,236</b>

Source: Census 2023, Statistics New Zealand



**Table 41 The proportion of Ngāi Tahu who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, by Wellington Regional Council districts, 2023**

Area	%	Count
Kapiti Coast District	20	948
Porirua City	20	1,002
Upper Hutt City	11	726
Lower Hutt City	15	1,584
Wellington City	13	2,607
Masterton District	12	780
Carterton District	5	180
South Wairarapa District	7	219
<b>Total Wellington Region</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8,088</b>

Source: Census 2023, Statistics New Zealand

**Table 42 The proportion of Ngāi Tahu who can hold a conversation in te reo Māori, Auckland Local Board Area, 2023**

Area	%	Count
Rodney Local Board Area	6	579
Hibiscus and Bays Local Board Area	6	705
Upper Harbour Local Board Area	6	393
Kaipātiki Local Board Area	9	510
Devonport–Takapuna Local Board Area	6	336
Henderson–Massey Local Board Area	18	753
Waitākere Ranges Local Board Area	9	429
Waiheke Local Board Area	7	84
Waitematā Local Board Area	11	606
Whau Local Board Area	9	393
Albert–Eden Local Board Area	10	696
Puketāpapa Local Board Area	12	150
Ōrākei Local Board Area	6	528
Maungakiekie–Tāmaki Local Board Area	15	387
Howick Local Board Area	5	504
Māngere–Ōtāhuhu Local Board Area	24	276
Ōtara–Papatoetoe Local Board Area	19	189
Manurewa Local Board Area	21	405
Papakura Local Board Area	16	387
Franklin Local Board Area	8	714
<b>Total Auckland</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9,036</b>

Source: Census 2023, Statistics New Zealand

Nationwide 83 percent of Ngāi Tahu speak only English, 1.7 percent speak English and another language (not Māori), 11 percent speak and te reo Māori alongside English, one percent speak multiple languages including te reo Māori, and 0.4 percent speak only te reo Māori. Additionally, Ngāi Tahu living in Auckland are more likely to speak a third language other than te reo Māori. In Auckland, 4.3 percent speak another language other than English of te reo, in comparison to 2.7 percent nationwide. Table 43 shows that Ngāi Tahu living in the South Island are more likely to only speak English than other parts of the country.

**Table 43 The proportion of Ngāi Tahu who can hold a conversation in an official language, by select regions**

Language	NZ	North Island	South Island	Auckland	Canterbury	Gisborne	Bay of Plenty
<b>Can not kōrero te reo:</b>							
No language	3.2	3.1	3.3	3.2	3.3	3.6	3.1
English only	82.9	80.0	85.3	83.2	84.5	67.1	77.8
NZ Sign Language only	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
English and NZ Sign Language only	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.2
English and other only	1.4	1.6	1.1	2.7	1.3	0.6	1.2
English, NZ Sign Language, and other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other languages only	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total, no kōrero te reo	87.9	85.1	90.1	89.6	89.6	71.6	82.2
<b>Can kōrero te reo:</b>							
Māori only	0.4	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.3	1.2	0.6
Māori and English only	10.8	13.2	8.8	9.0	9.2	25.1	15.6
Māori, English, and NZ Sign Language	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.9	0.6
Māori, English and Other	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.8	0.5	0.9	0.8
Māori, English, NZ Sign Language, and other	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.1
Other combination of Māori, English, NZ Sign Language, and other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total, kōrero te reo</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>28.4</b>	<b>17.8</b>
<b>Total stated</b>	<b>84,966</b>	<b>38,190</b>	<b>46,656</b>	<b>9,036</b>	<b>24,501</b>	<b>993</b>	<b>4,224</b>

Source: Census 2023, Statistics New Zealand

Table 44 The number of Ngāi Tahu who can hold a conversation in an official language, by select regions

Language	NZ	North Island	South Island	Auckland	Canterbury	Gisborne	Bay of Plenty
<b>Can not kōrero te reo:</b>							
No language	2,727	1,188	1,536	285	816	36	129
English only	70,443	30,546	39,795	7,521	20,706	666	3,285
NZ Sign Language only	12	6	9	3	6	–	–
English and NZ Sign Language only	282	117	168	36	93	3	9
English and other only	1,164	630	531	246	312	6	51
English, NZ Sign Language and other	9	3	6	3	3	–	–
Other languages only	24	9	15	3	6	–	–
Total, no te reo	74,661	32,499	42,060	8,097	21,942	711	3,474
<b>Can kōrero te reo:</b>							
Māori only	300	189	114	24	78	12	27
Māori and English only	9,159	5,040	4,095	813	2,259	249	660
Māori, English, and NZ Sign Language	282	144	135	18	81	9	24
Māori, English, and other	474	261	213	75	117	9	33
Māori, English, NZ Sign Language, other	69	45	27	9	15	3	6
Other combination of Māori, English, NZ Sign Language, other	21	12	12	–	9	–	–
<b>Total, kōrero te reo</b>	<b>10,305</b>	<b>5,691</b>	<b>4,596</b>	<b>939</b>	<b>2,559</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>750</b>
<b>Total stated</b>	<b>84,966</b>	<b>38,190</b>	<b>46,656</b>	<b>9,036</b>	<b>24,501</b>	<b>993</b>	<b>4,224</b>

Source: Census 2023, Statistics New Zealand

## 8 Conclusion

The data suggests that areas with smaller Māori populations can still reap the benefits of te reo Māori fluency by living within a reasonable proximity to areas with a high Māori population. Additionally, central city areas have higher te reo proficiency, indicating that the availability of infrastructure might provide access to te reo Māori learning.

The more that a language, such as te reo Māori, is spoken around you, the more you use it, and the more fluent you become. Being immersed in te reo Māori use is a key driver; from speaking it at home to informal environments, access to areas where te reo Māori is spoken and used is influential. Importantly, access to multiple environments creates a compounding effect for growing fluency.

Furthermore, these conducive environments do not necessarily need to be formal te reo environments; rather, informal interactions positively contribute towards improving fluency.

Expanding access to te reo Māori goes beyond physical locations such as homes and community classes. It is essential to provide comprehensive resources that facilitate learning. The data underscores this point, showing that a considerable number of Māori individuals who speak te reo Māori well or very well attribute their proficiency to self-directed learning.

The combined effect of density and access to te reo Māori environments are key factors in enabling language use to grow. These factors work together to allow te reo Māori use and fluency to thrive. Creating a reinforcing network that promotes fluency and widespread language use.

Te reo Māori speakers mostly live in the North Island, or in areas with a high Māori population density that has a strong connection to te ao Māori. Proficient speakers can be any age, and most likely have parents and/or grandparents who can speak te reo Māori. A profile of a te reo Māori speaker is as follows:

- Has parents or family members living at home who speak te reo Māori (85 percent)
- Attends hui or events where te reo Māori is spoken (83 percent)
- Goes home often to or is involved with their iwi or hapū (75 percent)
- Is self-motivated to learn te reo Māori by teaching themselves (71 percent)
- Attended a Māori medium school (51 percent)
- Lives in a region, district, or suburb with a large proportion of Māori.