DATA HUI: WRAP UP SUMMARY, Richard Harman.

I'm not one of you --- I'm a journalist --- and outsider --- so my account of what has happened here today is the view of a layperson; someone who has no particular knowledge of what you have all been talking about.

As I have seen it, there have been several main themes today:

- The utility of statistics and data.
- But statistics are not about numbers --- they are about people.
- That means thinking about the human element --- and the point has been made emphatically here today --- that means not just thinking from one point of view but, for example, thinking about a Māori world view as well.
- There was a lot of talk about partnerships --- particularly between statistics and non-governmental organisations.
- So how are those partnerships to develop, and what are the precautions that need to be taken?
- That raises the question of who owns the data --- or the rights to the data.
- And does that imply those people who use data require a social licence from the community who provide the data?

Not surprisingly, probably, it was the two Ministers two emphasised the uses to which data could be put. Craig Foss said it had the capacity to provide a rich picture of our society and that the more data we had, the more we could home in on the statistical gems. But how we use that data was critical, he said.

So he introduced the IDI --- the Integrated Data Infrastructure.

Simply, he said, by incorporating both conventional Statistics NZ data along with other Government data such as drivers licences, its use

would enable the Government to target its social investment spending much more precisely --- he talked about getting "more bangs for our buck".

Bill English picked this theme up --- he emphasised the role that evidence had played in the development of Budget 2016 --- and would play even more in Budget 2017.

But it wasn't only the politicians who emphasised the measure of utility that should be applied to data.

Will Edwards said Māori NGO's should always be asking, "How does our work best serve our people?"

Debbie Sorensen said, "We all want to know what works."

And that was a theme other speakers picked up. Data may be based on the past but what they wanted was to use it as guide to the future.

Materoa Mar said, "We know a lot about what the ills are; not very often are we realised in our potential and ability to contribute to society."

Herewini Te Koha said, "We must move the dial in our part of the world; we need to confront some tough social and economic conditions."

And he saw the IDI as an opportunity to help to do that; "To move forward," he said.

But that first session also made the point that data was not just numbers, it was about people.

Will Edwards said there had to be a human element in data --- no matter how clever the technology was. "What matters is the importance of people's wellbeing," he said.

"How does our work best serve our people?"

And Liz McPherson took that theme up.

She said data was not about numbers but about the people behind the numbers.

However, because data is about people, then very human concerns and even emotions come into play in data partnerships.

Hon Craig Foss made the point that people don't want to be hassled by data gatherers.

"People expect to give us their information only once," he said.

Hon Bill English said the issue of data sovereignty was going to take some sorting out --- and what it meant for some who owned the data.

"All the time it went back to the social licence," he said.

And Māori speakers had clear views on that. Will Edwards made the point that the Māori collective view of the world conflicted with the commercial individualistic view of the world.

How did data measured by iwi or rohe square with statistics broken down into cell blocks?

Debbie Sorensen, making the point that there was no island called "Pacific," talked about the need to differentiate between different Pacific Island ethnicities, such as Tongan and Samoan, in designing social interventions, and said there was "A challenge in collecting ethnic specific data". Many agencies didn't.

Liz MacPherson said Statistics needed to be able to walk alongside NGOs and each needed to be able to stop when they found things weren't working.

Materoa Mar was able to report that Te Tihi o Ruahine's alliance with Stats was working well --- though she did say she wanted things to go faster!

All the speakers mentioned the question of access rules to the data – and, with that, privacy and confidentiality.

At the practical level, Dorothy Adams stressed that the Social Investment Unit was open to feedback on the way it was using data -- and Megan McKenna explained the way the SIU's Data Exchange would work.

She introduced us to the idea of the limpet --- software that would define what data was released from the central core and who got to see it.

Interestingly, she said the biggest challenge had not been the technicality of building the exchange but the need for cultural change in the agencies who interacted with it.

Laura Black with her dream of what data could do for Methodist Mission Southern (in Dunedin) warned that gathering data could not just turn into a trawl --- "There's an awful lot of information that is useless," she said.

And Dame Diane Robertson defined social licence for us. She said there was a need to have a conversation with New Zealanders about the issue.

Danae Goddard Ward offered some contrary points.

"There were alternatives to consumers owning their data," she said.

And then the ultimate warning from Professor Rhema Vaithianathan.

"What could go wrong?" But what did go wrong for her was exactly what all the other speakers worried about --- proceeding without the buy-in of the people who were providing the data and who were going to benefit from it.

So the overall theme was simple --- data is not just numbers; it is about people.