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EDS on Fracking Report

The Environmental Defence Society has welcomed the report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment on fracking.

“This report reveals the complexities of fracking, the reliance on high quality environmental management to prevent pollution and the gaps in the present regulatory settings,” said EDS Chairman Gary Taylor.

“It says that the industry has to do much more to obtain the “social licence to operate” - that is, acceptance from the broader community that it is following best practice. EDS agrees and it was pleasing to see reference to our earlier concerns about the way the sector “games” the RMA by unbundling required resource consents.

“It is important that resource consents are applied for and assessed together so the full implications of what is proposed can be known, instead of seeking consents stage by stage. We note that a second phase of the Commissioner’s investigations is proposed that will address these regulatory issues. That work should also explore the gaps in the current system where environmental effects and risks are dealt with by different agencies.

“The Commissioner also addresses the overarching issue of climate change.

“Government support for the oil and gas sector represents a dangerous policy bias given the way it has gutted domestic climate change policy by measures that have reduced the price of carbon to a token quantum.

“If we are to have more oil and gas produced in New Zealand, we need to see more balanced policy settings in which carbon is properly priced and renewables are prioritised. The Commissioner should address this matter more thoroughly in her second report.

“We note that overall this report sets out the key issues relating to fracking in a coherent and fair way. Whether fracking is acceptable in a given location will depend on a number of variables, including the location characteristics, the competency of the explorer, the way wastewater is disposed of and whether there is potential for aquifer contamination.

“This is not a green light for fracking but is a timely wake-up call for early reform of fracking consenting and monitoring.

“Most significantly of all, it reinforces the need for a rethink about New Zealand’s strategic response to the big challenge of climate change,” Mr Taylor concluded