



22 July 2012
Media Release

EDS says criticism of Mackenzie Country process unfair

The Environmental Defence Society says a story in a Sunday paper that is critical of both former Environment Minister Hon Dr Nick Smith and Waitaki MP Jacqui Dean for their roles in the forum on the future of the Mackenzie Country is unfair.

“First, the inference that the Upper Waitaki Forum was initiated by Southdown Holdings (the company that proposed cubicle farming in the area) is incorrect,” said EDS Chairman Gary Taylor.

“The Forum idea was initially suggested by EDS. However it really took off after local interests, including the 2 Mayors and many of the long-standing landowners, took ownership of the concept.

“Secondly, the insinuation that there is something underhand in the fact that government funding was used to support the initiative is unfair. What evolved over the Mackenzie country was similar to the much-lauded Land and Water Forum – where the government supported a collaborative process aimed at reaching a consensus amongst stakeholders over a complex policy issue. EDS lobbied the government to support both engagement processes with funding and the amount is a lot less than the ongoing costs of litigation.

“Both the Land and Water Forum and the Mackenzie exercise have worked well and both are expected to issue final reports and recommendations shortly.

“As to Guy Salmon’s role as a consultant, he is New Zealand’s leading expert on collaborative approaches to policy-making having studied the process in Scandinavian countries and adapted it for our purposes. He was clearly selected to run the Mackenzie process on merit. Any suggestion to the contrary is a cheap shot.

“And the local MP, Jacqui Dean, was extremely helpful in the overall process and should be commended for her initiative and willingness to support a fresh approach.

“Finally, as to the alleged scepticism of the Ministry for the Environment over the Mackenzie initiative, the Ministry was also sceptical of the Land and Water Forum initially. It has now embraced the concept because it is working.

“Collaboration is an excellent way of resolving difficult policy conflicts - working through the issues to a consensus. The only losers, as a result of clearer and supported ways forward, are the lawyers as a result of reduced litigation.