

18 October 2012

Media Release

Environmental Group supports Auckland Unitary Plan decision

The announcement by the Minister for the Environment, Amy Adams, that government will be amending the Resource Management Act to provide for a single hearing for the Auckland Unitary Plan has qualified support from EDS.

“We agree that Auckland is unique in the size and complexity of its plan-making process. The Unitary Plan will cover one-third of New Zealand’s population (with more than 70 plans embracing the other two-thirds). Having a single hearing in these circumstances makes sense provided it contains all the checks and balances of the conventional two-stage process,” said EDS Chairman Gary Taylor.

“In our view the conventional process mitigates against the interests of community groups in that it is at least twice as resource intensive as what is proposed and takes far too long. It advantages the business sector over community groups, the former having corporate longevity and deeper pockets to fund extensive litigation.

“And whilst individual businesses might prefer to preserve appeal rights to the Environment Court, the Auckland economy as a whole needs the Unitary Plan in place to provide investment certainty.

“Blending the council and Environment Court hearings into one with rights to test evidence by cross-examination and having extensive consultation clipped on to the front-end is a practical way forward.

“There are two important caveats to our support. First, we think there will need to be more than one Panel. It’s vital that people have enough time to present if there’s just one opportunity. Having two or more Panels working in parallel on discrete topics will be required to manage the massive number of submissions.

“Secondly, the quality of the hearings Panel will need to be above reproach. If Government is making appointments in consultation with the Council, it’s vital that we get high quality, independent, experienced Panel members – and not people with an axe to grind.

“The Auckland Unitary Plan will shape the future of Auckland for many years to come. For our part, we will be taking every opportunity to ensure that it provides a high level of environmental outcomes consistent with the aspiration of becoming the world’s most liveable city,” Mr Taylor concluded.

More: Gary Taylor (09) 480 2565