



10 August 2014

Media Release: EDS Conference Communique

The Environmental Defence Society's conference *Navigating our Future: addressing risk and building resilience*, held earlier this week in Auckland, canvassed some of the major environmental challenges facing the world and New Zealand.

"Keynote speakers addressed the increasing ecological footprint of people on the planet, the burgeoning challenge of climate change and the need to foster understanding of the need for environmental bottom lines above which economic development could take place," said EDS Chairman Gary Taylor.

"There was general agreement that public understanding of the state of the environment is poor and needs to be improved so that political mandates for change are created.

"A panel of young New Zealanders spoke passionately and convincingly of the need for the current generation of leaders to act now to address climate change and biological decline.

"A Political Party Forum on the environment revealed some remarkable agreement between parties on environmental policies.

The Forum included Te Ururoa Flavell, Rt Hon Winston Peters, Hon David Parker, Maggie Barry and Dr Russel Norman.

"The big area of agreement was on the need to address freshwater concerns in a robust and comprehensive way," said Gary Taylor, who moderated the discussion.

"It was especially interesting to see the Green Party and New Zealand First both passionately espousing the need to improve fresh water quality, raising the potential for them to work together on the issue.

"Labour released a comprehensive freshwater policy earlier in the day and is similarly committed to action. The Maori Party reiterated its support for calls from iwi leaders to clean up New Zealand's streams and rivers, whilst National pointed to the steps it had taken to date.

"There was broad agreement on the need for freshwater reform: the differences are around the speed of change, with National proposing a slower pace than all the other parties.

“On RMA reform, Labour, the Greens, NZ First and the Maori Party expressed serious reservations about National’s proposed changes to the core purpose and principles of the Act.

“However Maggie Barry confirmed the Prime Minister’s undertaking to EDS and other ENGOs at a meeting last week that a new National-led government would take a fresh look at the present proposals and explore a less confrontational approach.

“There was general agreement that processes under the Act could be improved.

“On the big issue of climate change, there was less congruence. Labour and National favour retaining the ETS, the Greens want a carbon tax and New Zealand First prefers a range of alternative measures. The Maori Party supports putting a price on carbon, meaning that it could potentially support a Labour, National or Greens policy approach. New Zealand First supported the idea of a Climate Commission, like the one in the United Kingdom, which monitors domestic policy implementation.

“The Leaders’ forum was a very positive discussion.

“My own perspective, after having moderated a number of these discussions over the years, was that all parties were very engaged, well informed and concerned to do the right thing. It was quite uplifting.

“Later in the conference Hon Dr Nick Smith, in a keynote address, affirmed his strong personal support for oceans reform, including but not limited to new Marine Protected Areas legislation.

“Overall, there was a sense of increasing optimism due to the political leaders taking the environmental agenda seriously as we head into an election campaign. Approaching some of the key issues in a collaborative rather than a confrontational way emerged as a key theme.

“Other highlights from the conference included strong support for the establishment of a New Zealand Futures Commission, reporting to Parliament, that would look at longer-term strategies and policies as an alternative to short-term political horizons.

“Finally, there was a suggestion floated from EDS that the Environmental Protection Authority could take on a broader compliance role under the RMA. This followed concerns about regional councils becoming increasingly conflicted as both irrigation developers and water regulators,” Mr Taylor concluded.

Conference presentations will be available on www.edskonference.com shortly.

The Leaders’ Forum is available at <http://www.allaboutauckland.com/video/2873/eds-conference-2014---navigating-our-future/1>