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Media Release

EDS welcomes appointments of new environment and conservation ministers



The Environmental Defence Society has welcomed the appointment of Dr Nick Smith and Maggie Barry to cabinet, as Ministers for the Environment and Conservation respectively.

“Both Ministers are experienced and come out of National’s Blue-green stable,” said EDS Chairman Gary Taylor.

“Dr Nick Smith has held the environment portfolio before and Maggie Barry has chaired the Environment and Local Government Select Committee.

“Dr Smith, as the new Minister for the Environment will have a busy three years. Apart from the environmental reforms already in train, there would be merit in revisiting the role and functions of his Ministry. On most indicators, New Zealand’s environmental quality is deteriorating and a fix is urgently needed and that might require a fresh look at the effectiveness of the Ministry.

“We should be able to make good progress on the key issue of freshwater management, National intends to regulate that dairy cattle should be kept out of freshwater systems. It also committed to collaborative processes in freshwater plan making and to implementing the Land and Water Forum’s recommendations on freshwater management.

“We also look forward to a more collaborative approach on RMA reforms. National has a clear mandate for reform and that there are many ways the Act could be improved to enable prompt and less bureaucratic decision-making. The big challenge is how to do that without sacrificing environmental quality.

“This approach would be consistent with the Prime Minister’s undertaking to peak environmental groups in July that it would be sensible to “hit the refresh button” on RMA reform.

“Serious engagement with Dr Smith and with other key stakeholders should be able to find an agreed way forward that creates a stable platform for economic growth.

“We also look forward to National progressing the Environmental Reporting Bill. Getting good information about the state of the environment is an essential building block for constructive and targeted policy responses.

“We also welcome the appointment of Maggie Barry as Minister of Conservation. We know Maggie Barry well and look forward to working with her.

“New Zealanders may not realise how much biodiversity we are losing in spite of heroic efforts by many to turn the tide. For example, the kiwi population is declining at 2-3% per annum. If that rate continues, the bird could be lost by mid century. DOC has a really important role in protecting biodiversity on private land and we will be discussing new approaches with the Minister.

“We look forward to working with the new Ministers on a moderate and progressive reform agenda,” Mr Taylor concluded.