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Media Release

EDS seeks moderation in RMA reforms

EDS notes that the Minister for the Environment, Hon Dr Nick Smith, is to set out his evolving thinking on the vexed issue of RMA reforms in a speech this evening to the Nelson Rotary Club.

“We look forward to hearing the Minister’s latest thoughts,” said EDS Chairman Gary Taylor.

“I hope that the new Minister will adopt the moderate approach to reform signalled earlier by the Prime Minister. The RMA is a crucially important tool for protecting New Zealand’s environment and needs strengthening rather than weakening.

“In particular, it’s vitally important to at least maintain the protections for outstanding landscapes, the coast and our biodiversity. That means that sections 6 and 7 of the Act should not be substantially modified as proposed in the original discussion paper. It would not be acceptable for Government to seek to lower environmental standards as originally proposed.

“We accept however that there are a number of process amendments that could improve the operation of the Act and reduce compliance costs and the time taken in plan-making. Common templates, simpler plans, more clarity and faster processes are all sensible changes.

“We also look forward to the amendments proposed by the Land and Water Forum to plan-making for freshwater. Introducing a collaborative approach should assist with getting community buy-in to freshwater limit-setting.

“There is also a case for changes to prioritise affordable housing. We fully expect that the approach set out in the Housing Accords and Special Housing Areas Act 2013 will be transferred to the RMA and become a permanent part of the planning set-up. Other changes will include reference to natural hazards, important given anticipated impacts of rising sea levels.

“Overall we maintain some confidence that the Minister is on the right track and has hit the refresh button on RMA reform. We hope and expect that a broad consensus may emerge amongst political parties so the expected Bill ultimately has cross-party support,” Mr Taylor concluded.