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**Media Release: EDS endorses Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment's recommendations on water quality**

The two reports released by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment today reinforce the need for further improvements to the way we manage freshwater.

"The reports highlight that dairy conversions are still continuing apace and that a consequence is more pollution from land use entering waterways," said EDS Chairman Gary Taylor.

"However she also correctly praises the government for its reform trajectory, which is largely in conformity with recommendations from the Land and Water Forum.

"EDS, as the instigator of the Forum, continues to have confidence in that process as it involves all stakeholders in freshwater working towards a broad consensus on the way forward.

"The Commissioner highlights the need for greater clarity in the National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management. She correctly identifies the ambiguities in some of the wording that we pointed out last year. She calls for the so-called "unders and overs" approach, where some waterways could deteriorate if others are improved, to be removed.

"We support the deletion of the word "overall" which is responsible for the ambiguity and would add that an interpretation of the NPS that allows deterioration is unlawful anyway, a point on which the Environment Court recently agreed.

"She has also called for the National Objectives Framework, part of the National Policy Statement, to be improved by the addition of macroinvertebrate community index (MCI) (which measures ecosystem health) and other criteria left out of the initial version. We agree and were critical of the Ministry when that happened.

"The reality is that urgent action needs to be taken now to improve water quality. We think regional councils need to get ahead of the reform process and not wait for expected changes to kick in.

"The RMA imposes clear and present obligations on them and has done for some time. We concur with Jan Wright's conclusion that whilst progress is being made, it is slow and we need more action now," Mr Taylor concluded.

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