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Media Release: EDS congratulates the Productivity Commission on urban planning report

The Environmental Defence Society has praised the Productivity Commission's report on urban planning which was released earlier today.

"The report is a very comprehensive, thoughtful and constructive analysis of the resource management system from the perspective of the needs of towns and cities," said EDS CEO Gary Taylor.

"The report finds that resource management challenges in towns and rural areas are different. We agree: the current system, following a large number of ad hoc amendments over many years, has evolved into a clunky hybrid that satisfies few.

"The Commission's report book-ends our own report, released last year, that found that the system was not producing good environmental outcomes. Clearly, if the system is failing both town and country, something needs to be done.

"The Commission has recommended a new act that would contain separate objectives and principles for the built and natural environments. Crucially, it acknowledges the need for clear environmental limits to apply everywhere.

"It also promotes the use of long-term spatial planning to achieve an integrated approach across various statutory instruments. That is a very good idea.

"Echoing the OECD's report from last week, the Commission asserts a clear need to reform the system of funding infrastructure. For instance, both entities support road user charges, which is an idea that is overdue for deployment.

"A range of other recommendations including a one-stop shop for planning hearings, with rights of appeal to the Environment Court limited to points of law, need more thought. Public participation rights should not be curtailed.

"The big question is what's next? EDS contends that while this review establishes a sound basis for reform, we need to think carefully about a process that works for all. Reform of the resource management system will affect all New Zealanders and has constitutional implications. EDS is therefore embarking on its own major review of the system and expects to generate further useful ideas over the next 18 months.

"In terms of process, we favour the appointment of a Royal Commission on Resource Management. The way forward must be depoliticised, have huge integrity and focus on our country's needs over the next 30 years," Mr Taylor concluded.