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Media release

Environment Court calls for pause on tenure review in Mackenzie Country

On Thursday last week the Environment Court issued its long-awaited decision on plan change 13 to the Mackenzie District Plan. The purpose of PC13 is to insert provisions into the district plan to protect the Mackenzie Basin's outstanding natural landscapes and ecology.

"The Court was faced with a complex set of issues exacerbated by the time the proceedings have taken: this plan process started in 2007," said Gary Taylor, EDS's Chief Executive

"In that period an alarming proportion of what PC13 was intended to save – the unique indigenous flora and the Basin's stunning landscapes - has been lost.

"Federated Farmers has played a disappointing game, delaying the outcome with litigation whilst its members have cracked on with consent applications and dairy conversions that will frustrate PC13's protections.

"As the Court observed, Federated Farmers appears to have ignored the Basin's unique and threatened ecology and the growing evidence that pastoral intensification is eradicating those values at an increasing pace.

"Although the Court had limited ability to change the provisions proposed by Council because of scope limitations, it has done its best, and most of EDS's concerns have been addressed. It has put in place effective regulatory controls over future pastoral intensification and agricultural conversion.

"PC13 is thus an important further step towards protection of the remaining outstanding landscape and ecological values of the Mackenzie Country.

"Significantly, the Environment Court has recommended a moratorium on tenure review so a comprehensive "all station review" can be undertaken. In our view, many tenure review outcomes to date have been unlawful because the requirement to prioritise ecological values has not been achieved. EDS supports a moratorium.

"The next planning step is for the Mackenzie District Council to commence the much-awaited review of its district plan. Given the pressures in the district it would be sensible to start that with a focus on rural plan provisions.

"Meanwhile EDS is continuing to work with the key agencies to try to get a more joined-up and consistent approach towards the Mackenzie Country that delivers better long-term environmental outcomes," concluded Mr Taylor.