

17 February 2019



## Media Release

### EDS not convinced abandoning tenure review is a good thing

The Environmental Defence Society (EDS) has concerns about the decision to abandon tenure review, as described in the discussion paper released by Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) today.

“We are surprised that the Government has already decided to abandon tenure review rather than consult on that proposition,” said EDS CEO Gary Taylor.

“It is presenting the public with a *fait accompli* on the big issue and then consulting on secondary matters. It would have been better to get public feedback before making such a big call. Tenure review, if run properly, could be a useful tool.

“The problem has arguably been in its implementation which has seen the public ripped off and leaseholders given exorbitant profits. Past administrative errors and processes could have been addressed whilst retaining the ability to use tenure review to achieve reversion of full ownership of highly valued land to the Crown.

“Instead, the only remaining tool to achieve that outcome is buying out a leaseholder’s interests. But there is no commitment to funding that. Without dedicated funding being part of the new policy settings, we are left with a pretty empty tool box.

“The discussion paper is otherwise a fair and honest appraisal of the inadequacies of the present set-up for managing the Crown’s interests in the High Country. Clearly the Government is looking for a fix and is looking to retain a long-term interest in the land.

“The proposed continuing reliance on a discretionary consenting process administered by the Commissioner of Crown Lands as a sustainability driver is also problematic. The report does propose some greater degree of accountability for the Commissioner but does not consider alternative approaches.

“The Commissioner is the most unaccountable civil servant in the country and past Commissioners have made decisions that are questionable in law. Approving massive dairy conversions in the Mackenzie Basin are a case in point.

“It may be that the Commissioner’s role should be axed altogether and a new approach adopted that would achieve improved accountability and better alignment with RMA processes.

“This paper needs to be read alongside LINZ’s recently released review of its regulatory systems. That review is a remarkably candid analysis of historical shortcomings in managing Crown pastoral leases. LINZ is clearly determined to lift its game with new leadership and frank self-evaluation.

“So notwithstanding our concerns about some of the content in today’s report, EDS remains supportive of LINZ and its Minister as they work to improve outcomes in the High Country.

“We will be seeking a meeting with the Minister of Finance to discuss how a dedicated acquisition fund could be created to replace tenure review. That is the key missing link in the new regime.

“We will be carefully reviewing the report and will make a substantive submission by the closing date of 12 April,” Mr Taylor concluded.