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Media Release



EDS welcomes new commitments to freshwater reform from National and Labour and criticises Federated Farmers for misleading comments

The Environmental Defence Society has welcomed the commitment by the Labour Leader, Jacinda Ardern, to put a charge on commercial uses of freshwater. The announcement was made at the EDS conference earlier this week.

“Imposing a differential royalty on freshwater taken from rivers, lakes and aquifers has always made good sense,” says EDS CEO Gary Taylor.

“Freshwater is a public good and when it is taken for a profit-making enterprise, it makes sense to clip the ticket. That will help drive the best and most efficient use of our precious freshwater.

“We also welcome the gazettal yesterday of the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2017, the text of which was released by Environment Minister Hon Dr Nick Smith at the EDS conference.

“This revised NPS “fixes” the deficiencies in the earlier version by introducing new bottom lines regarding ecological health and swimming. We thank the Minister for this important regulatory improvement in the national direction on freshwater.

“What is bemusing however is the hysterical reaction from Federated Farmers to the water charging proposal. Its spokesperson, Chis Allen, knows very well that Government is looking at water charging through its allocation technical advisory group.

“And taking the estimated bottling charge and extrapolating that premium charge across bulk users is a misrepresentation of the announcement. The proposal is to charge on a per litre basis for bottling and on a cubic metre basis for irrigation.

“It’s entirely appropriate for the long-running subsidy for agricultural users of a public resource to end and for them to start paying a small charge.

“Jacinda Ardern said that the actual price would be considered by a stakeholder group, that it would be fair and would not intrude excessively on profitability. I also heard that the revenue would be returned to regional councils and iwi to improve water management and quality.

“In contrast to the hyperbole from Federated Farmers, EDS is pleased with the direction of travel on this important issue from political leaders. The recognition that the public is demanding better management of freshwater and using pricing as a tool to support voluntary and improved regulatory effort is welcome,” Mr Taylor concluded.