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Media Statement

***Our Land 2018* report is a call for action on environment**

The Environmental Defence Society has commended the Ministry for the Environment and Stats New Zealand for their latest environmental report, *Our Land 2018*.

“This latest in the series of environmental reports under the Environmental Reporting Act 2015, focuses on the state of land and soil. It acknowledges some serious data gaps but is otherwise a useful, insightful and frankly worrying analysis that shows mostly declining trends,” says EDS CEO Gary Taylor.

“In that respect it is similar to previous reports on other domains which have also shown mostly negative trends. We’ve got to do something and soon.

“For example, it reveals that between 1996 and 2012 we lost 31,000ha of tussock grassland - but we know that figure has dramatically increased since 2012. Similarly, it shows that large areas of indigenous shrubland, native forests and wetlands continue to diminish in spite of laws to protect them.

“Urban expansion is seeing productive and elite soils lost to development while exotic forest harvesting causes soil losses for 6-8 years.

“Overall the report reveals that we are losing 192 million tonnes of soil a year, 44% of it from exotic grasslands.

“Key drivers of loss, including of water quality, according to the report appear to be the 42% increase in the land area used by dairy farms in the period 2002-16 coupled with higher stocking rates.

“We know from previous reports about the extraordinarily high number of native species at risk from extinction on land. The only bright spot in that space is that 20 bird species are recovering because of active forest management. But that is an alarmingly small number against the total of around 215 bird taxa.

“What next? We can expect the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment to review the report and recommend responses. But mostly it reinforces the need for urgent action and provides irrefutable statistical support for the Government to push hard for big changes in the way we manage land.

“We consider it has a powerful and clear mandate from the electorate to do that.

“That means a suite of changes must be pushed forward including:

- a major overhaul of the Resource Management Act
- much better administration by regional councils
- deployment of a National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity
- strengthening the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management
- reviewing the National Environmental Standard on Plantation Forestry preparing a proper plan for the Billion trees

- investing more in pest and weed management
- more funding for DOC's core functions
- reducing stocking rates especially in dairying
- better urban planning.

"It's what this report leads to that's important. It should be possible in 2018 to stop further decline in our natural environment and kick-start restoration of much of what's been lost," Mr Taylor concluded.