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Media release

Federated Farmers attacks Mackenzie Country again

Federated Farmers has filed a High Court appeal against a recent Environment Court decision that put in place protection for the Mackenzie Country's outstanding landscape and natural values. Plan Change 13 was first notified in 2007 and has been the subject of 11 Environment Court decisions and persistent litigation by farming interests.

"We are very disappointed with Federated Farmers which has filed a succession of High Court appeals over the past 10 years trying to prevent protection for the Mackenzie Basin," said EDS CEO Gary Taylor.

"While it has been litigating, the various loopholes in the planning regime have been exploited to the maximum. 49% of the basin floor has been transformed by its members into intensive land uses through pivot irrigation, most notably to dairying. This is a disaster.

"We have seen the tussock and other native grasslands destroyed and the unique landscape of the intermontane basin changed forever. It is an environmental tragedy.

"If ever there was a place in New Zealand where we should say no more dairying, this is it.

"It is high, cold, and has thin natural soils. They have to truck cows out of the area over winter. It is not a natural environment suited to intensive farming. Significant human manipulation is required to change that. That is resulting in irreversible destruction of nationally and internationally significant ecological and landscape values.

"I cannot make any comment on the merits of the High Court appeal but I can say that the actions of Federated Farmers are contrary to the Mackenzie Country Agreement that took 18 months to agree at the Mackenzie Country Forum and that it signed up to.

"Fortunately the new rules are not stayed by the High Court appeal, so landowners still need to obtain resource consents from the district council before intensifying or converting land.

"However we have become aware that some landowners may be ignoring the new rules and acting unlawfully. We rely on Mackenzie District Council to enforce its district plan.

"The Council has given every indication that it takes its responsibilities very seriously. It is effectively custodian of the national values of the area. It needs public support.

"EDS will be joining these proceedings shortly and will vigorously defend the Environment Court's decision against Federated Farmers and press for an early hearing.

"We are seeking funding support for our case," Mr Taylor concluded.