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Media Release

EDS unsure new rules will keep oil cowboys out

The Environmental Defence Society has expressed doubt at comments by Prime Minister John Key at an oil and gas conference this week that he is confident new environmental rules will keep “cowboy operators” out of New Zealand waters.

“The Minister for the Environment Amy Adams recently announced that that oil and gas exploration is likely to be regulated as a non-notified discretionary application under new rules to be introduced later this year,” said EDS Chairman Gary Taylor.

“But Prime Minister John Key has stated that the regulatory regime will be “world class”.

“These two positions are in conflict with each other.

“A non-notified application would be dealt with in house by the politically appointed Environmental Protection Authority. There would be no opportunity for third parties to be heard by an independent hearings panel, no opportunity to question the applicant on its environmental record or intentions, and no opportunity to call expert evidence on the environmental effects of the exploration activity.

“Public scrutiny is an essential component of best practice environmental regulation. A closed-shop consenting regime is not transparent and raises the possibility of agency capture and political influence.

“Given the extreme consequences if something goes wrong this is quite unacceptable.

“It’s worth remembering that the Deep Water Horizon oil spill was from an exploration well that went bad. The lesson from that example is that deep-sea oil and gas exploration needs the highest quality environmental management to minimise risk and environmental impacts.

“EDS is not opposed to oil and gas exploration. But, like most New Zealanders, we want to see best practice out there to protect our ocean and coastlines. If we can’t have that then we question whether the consequences are worth the risks.

“Slack environmental regulation is an open invitation for oil cowboys to operate in our oceans,” Mr Taylor concluded.