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Media Release

EDS expresses concern at poorly conceived plans to tackle housing

The Environmental Defence Society has today released its submission on the Housing Accords and Special Housing Areas Bill.

“EDS recognises that New Zealand has a housing affordability problem but is not convinced that the proposed Bill will have any material impact on house prices,” said EDS Chairman Gary Taylor.

“There are a range of matters not covered by the Bill that are impacting on house prices including high labour costs, lack of scale in developments and outrageously high building materials costs.

“We are concerned that the proposals for the identification of Special Housing Areas don’t consider the need to ensure that increases in land and housing supply are achieved in an environmentally sustainable manner. The public interest will not be served if possible but unproven gains in housing affordability are outweighed by the environmental and social costs of poorly designed housing developments.

“The Bill also proposes that resource consents for development in Special Housing Areas need not be consistent with the Resource Management Act or regional and district plans. Decision makers need only ‘take into account’ and ‘have regard to’ these matters.

“This is a serious assault on our planning framework which can only lead to poor social and environmental outcomes – to be blunt: slums.

“We are also concerned at proposals for central government to act as consent authority for the identification of Special Housing Areas where a Housing Accord has not been reached. This is yet another example of central government overriding local democracy, and is inconsistent with the principle behind the Bill which is that central and local government should collaborate to address the perceived housing problem.

“Furthermore, the plans to exclude public notification and to limit rights of appeal in the Bill will ensure the exclusion of the public from important planning processes. These provisions are draconian. We are deeply concerned that this is a step too far, moving towards planning by executive fiat rather than by community engagement,” Mr Taylor concluded.

The Environmental Defence Society’s submission on the Housing Accords and Special Housing Areas Bill can be found at www.eds.org.nz

