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**Media Release: Decision will protect Tukituki River. Irrigation scheme now questionable**

The EPA's Board of Inquiry released its Final Report and Decision on the Tukituki Catchment Proposal this afternoon confirming its draft decision, which was released in April. The decision significantly strengthens the freshwater management regime, which will apply to the Tukituki catchment. It also grants consent to the Ruataniwha irrigation dam subject to conditions.

"The Board of Inquiry was unable to reconsider its substantive determinations as set out in the draft decision, in spite of pressure from some quarters for it to do so, but it did make a number of "minor or technical" changes," said EDS Chairman Gary Taylor.

"The final decision confirms that that the evidence in favour of a dual nutrient approach was 'compelling' and that the hands-off approach to the control of nitrogen proposed in the plan change 'would not give effect to the [National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management].'

"It has made some changes to the way nitrogen will be measured and we are still assessing the implications of those changes. We have some concerns that we will be relying on the regional council to monitor the instream limits and adjust the land leaching limits, given its conflicting roles as investor and regulator.

"Whether the Ruataniwha Irrigation Scheme can now proceed is questionable. The nitrogen limits effectively limit the intensity of land uses in the catchment. That will negatively impact on the commercial viability of the investment, which was marginal anyway. The risks of proceeding are high now that water quality must be maintained or improved in the Tukituki River.

"There must be better investments for \$80m of public money that would boost the economy without such risks.

"This decision is a big win for the Tukituki Catchment and also has wider implications for the management of freshwater quality elsewhere in the country. Like the Tukituki Plan Change when it was notified, the Government's proposed National Objectives Framework for freshwater contains limits for nitrogen toxicity only. This will need revisiting.

"The Government should be paying close attention to the Board of Inquiry's conclusion that limits for dissolved inorganic nitrogen are required to safeguard the life-supporting capacity of the Tukituki Catchment," concluded Mr Taylor.