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Media Release: EDS responds to Hon Dr Nick Smith's speech

The Environmental Defence Society is responding to Hon Dr Nick Smith's announcements today regarding RMA reforms.

"Dr Smith has outlined ten major changes the Government is proposing this year, said EDS Executive Director Gary Taylor.

"These include:

- Add natural hazards
- Recognise urban planning
- Prioritise housing affordability
- Acknowledge importance of infrastructure
- Greater weight to property rights
- National planning templates
- Speed up plan-making
- Encouraging collaborative resolution
- Strengthening national tools
- Internet for simplicity and speed

"Most of these changes have been anticipated and are broadly acceptable in principle. The devil will be in the detail and we look forward to seeing actual drafting in due course.

"The proposal to give great weight to property rights is however a concern. Recent work by EDS has demonstrated that we are losing biodiversity at an alarming rate and one of the reasons for this is that private property rights are overwhelming the public interest in conservation. We would argue that the balance needs to be tipped more in favour of the public interest and that prioritising private property rights will lead to environmental decline.

"We note with approval the Minister's continuing assurance that he does not intend to amend Section 5 of the Act which is the purpose section.

"Many of the process changes are sensible and had been signalled earlier in the Government's discussion paper. However, we are unsure whether the Minister is intending to limit the role of the Environment Court on plan appeals. Such a change would need careful consideration and discussion and would be controversial.

"A key concern we had was the original proposal to merge Sections 6 & 7 into an unprioritised list. Although the Minister has signalled some additions to both sections, the merger idea seems to have been dropped.

"We look forward to working with the Minister in a collaborative way as these reform ideas are developed further," Mr Taylor concluded.