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## Media Release



### **Government has a clear mandate to clean up freshwater**

The Environmental Defence Society says that the reaction to Environment Minister David Parker's comments about cows has been ill-informed.

"The previous government put in place environmental limits for freshwater in 2014 and then a more refined version in 2017 via the National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management," said EDS Chairman Gary Taylor.

"That requires all regional councils to set limits in freshwater plans by 2030. It is mandatory. So it was surprising to hear National spokespersons criticising limits when its government started us on that path. There is nothing new here.

"Furthermore, the Land and Water Forum worked up a consensus amongst all stakeholders that limits are needed so it's surprising to see some – but thankfully not all - Federated Farmers representatives criticising regulating for limits.

"What Mr Parker indicated is an intention to refine and speed up the current reform process and a clear intention to stop water quality getting worse in the interim, before plans are completed. That is entirely appropriate given the widespread public concerns about freshwater evident during the election.

"Yes it's also true that many farmers are doing great work in self-initiated efforts to reduce both runoff and get more efficient in water use. Good management practice is an important part of the suite of approaches being deployed. And it's fair comment for farmers to say that urban centres are not doing enough.

"The story becomes more complicated when iwi interests in freshwater are considered. Freshwater reforms are possible without settling iwi claims but ultimately they will need resolution. It is right and proper that should happen but the politics of it will be challenging. Minister Parker knows that.

"What has attracted most attention is his assertion that water quality limits might mean a reduction in dairy cow numbers in some places. That is a plain fact: the intensity of land use must not cause limits to be exceeded.

"The Minister also says he wants to stop things from getting worse. Who could disagree? But dairy expansion is proposed in extremely inappropriate locations such as the Mackenzie Country. EDS strongly favours a moratorium on intensive dairy expansions until new freshwater plans are put in place.

"Meantime we remain willing to work co-operatively with the Minister and the farming sector to develop a framework for freshwater management that works," Mr Taylor concluded.