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Media Release



Three important points about the fast track Covid-19 RMA bill

Earlier this week EDS responded to the proposed fast-track bill by saying it appears to have a number of important safeguards to protect the environment. We stand by that assessment, subject to seeing the draft, but have 3 new points for the Government to consider.

“First, the detailed criteria for decision-making under the bill have only been sketched out in a media release from the Minister,” said EDS CEO Gary Taylor.

“Several interest groups have indicated they would like to see the detail. Pertinent questions have arisen about the references to climate change drivers, to environmental bottom lines and to iwi rights and interests. We therefore suggest that the Minister should release the Cabinet paper very soon, given that enactment of the bill is itself on a fast track. That will allow informed commentary instead of speculation about the detail.

Secondly, some questions have been raised about why the public is going to be shut out of the process. Key stakeholder groups including some environmental ones will apparently be asked to comment on projects during the consenting phase, but not the public at large.

“The rationale for that is to ensure quick turn-around on applications (either 25 or 50 days). But we suggest that allowing written public submissions on applications, without the need for a hearing, need not lengthen time frames if done in parallel with the proposed engagement with stakeholders. And often local communities that know their environment can make useful inputs that will improve decision-making. So we suggest written public submissions on projects should be allowed.

“Thirdly, we agree with those that have argued for a climate change mitigation lens to be applied to project selection and consenting. We expect that any applications should routinely include an Assessment of Environmental Effects but in addition we contend that every applicant should provide a carbon budget and follow guidance from the Climate Change Commission.

“That will ensure that projects reduce, not increase our greenhouse gas emissions or at least employ offsets. That should mean transport infrastructure that improves the efficiency of road travel, favours rail, walking and cycling and supports electrification of all transport modes (cars, buses, light rail, trains) should be favoured.

“These big projects provide New Zealand with a great opportunity to take a big leap forward towards decarbonising our economy and getting promptly to 100% renewables.

“We also endorse DOC’s proposals for 6000 jobs in its nature-based employment scheme.

“Finally, we note that New Zealand appears at this stage to have dodged the Covid-19 bullet through robust and informed policy decisions by Government. It’s salutary to note that the death rate per million people offshore ranges from 693 for Belgium to 432 for the United Kingdom. Here the comparable rate is 4. Now the imperative is to apply that same leadership, intelligence and judgement to the economic recovery,” Mr Taylor concluded.