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Media statement

EDS calls for independent body to oversee the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area

In a new report released today, the Environmental Defence Society (EDS) has called for beefed up oversight of the Waitākere Ranges.

The report is one of a series of case studies EDS is undertaking as part of a broader investigation into landscape protection in New Zealand. EDS has already released case study reports on the Mackenzie Basin and tourism and landscape protection.

Co-authored by EDS Solicitor Cordelia Woodhouse, lawyer Shay Schlaepfer and EDS Policy Director Raewyn Peart, *Protecting the Waitākere Ranges* examines the effectiveness of the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area Act 2008 in protecting the nationally and regionally significant landscapes of the Waitākere Ranges. It was co-funded by the Waitākere Ranges Protection Society and Foundation North.

“The Waitākere Ranges is the largest area of contiguous indigenous vegetation within the Auckland region, and it supports a wide range of flora and fauna,” said Ms Woodhouse.

“It is a taonga for Te Kawerau ā Maki and Ngāti Whatua, a major recreational resource for Aucklanders, and it has been under considerable threat from the fast-expanding Auckland metropolitan area.

“Our research concluded that the Heritage Area Act, which established the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area, has made a substantial contribution to protecting the Ranges.

“It helped ensure that robust provisions were included in the Auckland Unitary Plan to protect the area.

“We also found that there had been a significant drop in the number of non-complying consent applications since the Act passed, indicating that it has had an appropriate chilling effect on proposals that are not compliant with the plan provisions.

“However, although the Act has been effective in heading off the threat of creeping subdivision, it has not been as effective in promoting positive changes.

“Kauri dieback disease is a major threat to the Waitākere Ranges and weeds and pests in the area are largely uncontrolled,” concluded Ms Woodhouse.

“We see the need for much more restoration effort in the Ranges,” said Ms Peart.

“There is great potential for properly resourcing local area plans so they can become strategic documents to guide government and community restoration efforts in the Ranges.

“We are also proposing the establishment of an independent body, with dedicated funding, to manage the Heritage Area on behalf of the public. This role could be performed by the Waitākere Ranges Local Board if it was appropriately resourced.

“Much of the success of the Heritage Area Act is reliant on its status as a national policy statement which must be given effect to in lower order planning documents.

“With the upcoming resource management reforms, this is something that needs to be recognised and carried forward,” concluded Ms Peart.

The Waitakere Ranges report is available [here](#)

The Mackenzie report is available [here](#)

The Tourism report is available [here](#)