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Media Release

EDS welcomes acceptance of its Mackenzie Country initiative

The Environmental Defence Society has welcomed the acceptance by key agencies of its proposal for a comprehensive and independent review of the management of the Mackenzie Country.

The initiative is a co-operative one including the Department of Conservation, Land Information New Zealand, Environment Canterbury, Waitaki District Council and Mackenzie District Council.

“This is a really important step forward for the Mackenzie Basin at a time when the current management regimes of the key players are poorly synchronised and are leading to cumulative losses of both indigenous vegetation including tussock grasslands and of outstanding landscapes,” said EDS CEO Gary Taylor.

“Earlier this year we approached all of the agencies involved in the area’s management and found a shared concern at the outcomes and a real willingness to resource a wide-ranging but short review looking at how agencies could better work together.

“Environment Canterbury has taken a lead in developing terms of reference for the review which is expected to kick off next month after a suitable independent person has been recruited.

“The terms of reference include looking at resource management plans and approaches, at tenure review, at the role of the Mackenzie Country Trust and how the earlier agreed Shared Vision Document could be implemented. That agreement put forward the idea of a 200,000 ha dryland park.

“Part of the context here is a long-running history of litigation. Mackenzie Council’s Plan Change 13 was first promulgated in 2007 and is still being contested by one farmer in the High Court. However Federated Farmers withdrew its High Court appeal earlier this week which is a pleasing development and an indicator of a more constructive approach.

“The intermontane basin of the Mackenzie Country is a hugely valued and unique part of New Zealand. But as the Environment Court found, it has reached a real tipping point with nearly 50% of it converted to intensive land uses. Robust policy and management interventions are needed right now.

“While the review is underway, EDS is endorsing the Environment Court’s call for a moratorium on further intensification while we chart the way forward,” Mr Taylor concluded.

More: Gary Taylor (09) 810 9594