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Media release

EDS releases first working paper from Resource Management Reform Project



EDS has released its first working paper as part of its RM Reform Project. The project is taking a first principles look at how New Zealand's resource management system operates and will provide an evidence-based perspective on how it could be improved for the coming decades.

"The RM system had its genesis in the 1980s and New Zealand has undergone massive changes since then. That is why EDS is examining what fundamental reform of our system should look like. This is a first for New Zealand and is taking a quite different approach to the *ad hoc* amendments that have characterised RM reforms to date," said Gary Taylor, EDS CEO.

"Working paper 1 is the first of three, which will culminate in a final report at the end of 2018. It focuses on the context for reform and key lessons learnt from the project team's international study tour to Europe and North America," said senior researcher Dr Greg Severinsen.

"We also address what we consider to be important normative questions. These include the world views and ethics that shape how we see our environment and our place in it, and the principles that help us translate those ethics to a functioning system. Later papers will build on this foundation and explore structural features of the system (such as how we design our legislation and institutions) and operational features (such as the tools we use to implement decisions).

"It's really important, when taking a first principles approach to reform, to go back to basics: no assumptions, no preconceived positions. This isn't about whether the RMA is good or bad, what the next round of amendments should look like, or whether you're a "greenie" or not. That kind of thinking merely produces polarising arguments. What we are looking for is a deeper understanding of what the system is, why we have it, and what we want it to do over the coming decades.

"Working paper 1 lays out a novel approach for the project as a whole. Instead of arranging analysis by environmental domains, particular spaces, or specific sectors, it looks at all those things within a framework based on themes – the things the system as a whole needs to do. For example, it needs to be based on ethics and principles, be expressed through a suite of legislation, institutions, and participatory structures, and be implemented through tools like regulations, funding mechanisms and economic instruments.

"Most importantly, we've got to remember that ethics and principles are not just nice words. They carry real meaning, and it's our job to make sure that meaning isn't lost when they're translated to outcomes on the ground," Dr Severinsen concluded.

The EDS project is being supported by the New Zealand Law Foundation, the Employers & Manufacturers Association, Property Council New Zealand, Infrastructure New Zealand and Watercare. It is being led by EDS Policy Director Raewyn Peart.

For more information on the project, and to download working paper 1, see [RM Reform Project](#).