

17 July 2019

## Media Release

### EDS submission on the Zero Carbon Bill calls for stronger legal sanctions

EDS has filed its submission on the Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Bill. The Bill sets targets for greenhouse gas reductions, provides for the government to set a series of carbon budgets, and sets up a new, independent, Climate Change Commission.

“The Bill is an enormously positive step in the right direction,” says Dr Greg Severinsen, senior advisor at EDS.

“We’ve now got numerical targets for reducing emissions, carbon budgets and plans and institutions to help realise them. The Climate Change Commission is a critically important step, and one we support. There are also proposals for overarching plans at a national level to help adapt to climate change. Leaving it to local councils was never going to cut it.

“However, we think there are some improvements that could be made to strengthen the Bill. We’d like to see stronger legal consequences if targets and budgets aren’t met. At the moment, all the courts can do in response to failure is make a declaration. A more robust consequence is needed and we set out our suggestions in the submission.

“There needs to be an obligation on decision-makers under other frameworks (like the Resource Management Act) to consider targets, budgets, climate change plans, and the recommendations of the Commission. These things need to be legally meaningful from the outset, not just a statement that is intended to inform action further down the track. It’s also outrageous that under the RMA local government is still actively *prevented* from considering the effects of activities on climate change. That is anomalous and needs to change.

“The Bill could also benefit from a more robust purpose statement and set of decision-making principles. We see merit in a broader purpose relating to the notion of climate neutrality.

“That will remind decision-makers of the bigger picture, even if it’s not expressed in specific numerical targets – for example, the desirability of offsetting methane emissions, the need to drive down gross CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and look for alternatives (not just planting more and more pine trees), and the benefits of negative emissions technology. It would also reflect the fact that mitigation measures are essential, but can have impacts on other aspects of the environment. We need to be seeking synergies for the benefit of New Zealand, and decision-making principles can provide guidance on that.

“But overall, the Bill is to be commended. And we implore MPs to take a cross-party approach here. A meaningful approach to climate change must be above party politics. Our future is at stake,” concluded Dr Severinsen.

*The full EDS submission on the Bill can be found [here](#)*