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Media release

EDS says farmers will need to perform as promised or lose all credibility

The Environmental Defence Society (EDS) has cautiously welcomed the announcement today of the new plan to reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions.

“The proposal is certainly innovative and pragmatic and addresses a longstanding policy blockage,” says Gary Taylor, CEO of EDS.

“It proposes a future levy-based scheme for pricing on-farm emissions that will be co-designed by the Government and the sector over the next few years. The intention is that it will kick off in 2025.

“In our view a farm-based levy is a viable alternative to a direct ETS obligation. The important thing is to have a price to incentivise changes in farm practice.

“Meantime the sector appears to have undertaken to reduce emissions meantime towards the proposed 10% reduction target by 2030. Our view is that we must be sceptical about whether they can deliver, given the overall poor response of the sector with respect to the freshwater challenge. We are uncertain about how those outputs will be measured. We will monitor that carefully over the interregnum.

“The Climate Change Commission will also be reviewing progress in 2022 and if insufficient recommend bringing the sector into the ETS as a backstop. That option will be included in the Bill being introduced today.

“The approach deliberately splits methane out from the other greenhouse gases and treats it differently. That is acceptable and is consistent with advice from the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment.

“The intention is to spend the next 5 years designing a scheme and that will be done jointly by the sector and the government. We’d prefer a more inclusive approach. Environmental interests have been excluded by the sector and the Government on this initiative to date and we need to be there to represent the public interest in this exercise. A closed shop is not an acceptable way forward.

“I also question whether the 5-year timeline has a sufficient urgency about it. Surely this scheme could be designed in 2 years.

“And finally, we should not lose sight of the need for gross emission reductions of CO₂. That is where real progress needs to be made and is being overlooked. A good start would be to target transport and foster a much more aggressive roll-out of EVs,” Mr Taylor concluded.