

9 June 2020



**Media statement: EDS seeks a better future for the Mackenzie Country**

In a new report released today, the Environmental Defence Society (EDS) has called for better protection of the Mackenzie Country through improved use of existing management tools as well as 2 new key initiatives: the establishment of a *Mackenzie Drylands Protected Area*, comprising publicly-owned land; and the creation of a *Mackenzie Basin Heritage Landscape* which would provide an extra protective layer over the balance of the Basin combined with substantial Government funding to support sustainable land management.

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. Co-authored by EDS Policy Director Raewyn Peart and Solicitor Cordelia Woodhouse, the report examines the reasons behind ongoing landscape loss in the Mackenzie Basin and ways to remedy the situation. It was co-funded by the Department of Conservation and Land Information New Zealand.

“Our work has taken on new and urgent relevance due to Covid-19,” said Ms Peart.

“The lockdown has hit New Zealand’s economy badly, particularly the tourism sector in places such as the Mackenzie Basin. It has also created time for reflection and the opportunity to change direction.

“Our Mackenzie Basin report should be read alongside our companion case study on tourism and landscape protection which we released in April. In that report, we advocated a move to ‘slow’ tourism to enable visitors to more deeply engage with the country’s landscapes and their stories, to better support local economies.

“Our current research indicates that we need a radical shift in the way we are managing the Mackenzie Country’s landscapes. Due to weak and conflicting policies, and poor agency performance, the Basin is close to losing its unique natural and cultural values.

“Our report is not just an academic review of relevant policy; it tells the story of the Basin from its early geological formation through to its natural and human history and current day challenges.

“The Mackenzie Basin is the only place in the country where it is still possible to see the entire intact glacial sequence from existing glaciers in the Southern Alps, through to moraines, outwash terraces and plains. It is home to a vast array of indigenous species, many of which are rare and especially adapted to the very harsh cold and dry climate.

“There have been considerable pressures on the area’s landscapes over a long period of time from pastoral farming, rabbits, hydro generation, wilding pines, irrigation and intensive dairying.

“A key driver for our review, and for EDS’s wider landscape study within which this case study sits, was concern at loss of landscape and natural values through incremental land use change on the Basin floor, especially through large-scale dairy conversions.

“In the report, we review the development of Simons Pass Station and the adjacent Simons Hill Station which were slated to house up to 15,000 dairy cows, which would make it the largest dairy farm in Australasia; how roughly 80 separate consents were obtained for this development makes a telling story of system failure.

“Due to its mix of public, private and pastoral leasehold land, and the split between the Waitaki and Mackenzie Districts, the Mackenzie Basin is managed by five statutory authorities. While management has been particularly disjointed in the past, agencies have now joined up their efforts and there seems to be considerable will to put things right.

“Our constructive discussions with pastoral farmers also indicate a willingness to work with others to preserve the special qualities of the Basin, while also making a living from the land.

“We see great potential in applying a new approach to the way we manage landscapes in New Zealand and the Mackenzie Country is a great place to start,” concluded Ms Peart

The EDS report sets out a number of recommendations on how landscape management should be strengthened in the Mackenzie Country. They include a number of improvements under existing law as well as some far-reaching policy shifts including:

- Establishing a joint-agency compliance, monitoring and enforcement unit in Twizel to strengthen current compliance effort in the Basin
- Urgently addressing gaps in the Waitaki District Plan
- Developing operational policy for discretionary consenting under the Crown Pastoral Land Act.
- Reforming the Crown Pastoral Land Act to address its weaknesses
- Developing a Mackenzie Basin sub-chapter for the Canterbury Regional Policy Statement.
- Developing a new integrated Canterbury Land and Water Plan to address landscape, biodiversity and freshwater management in an integrated manner
- Developing a more focused and supportive concessions policy under the Conservation Act
- Establishing a Mackenzie Basin Agency Team in Twizel to undertake delegated tasks from the five agencies
- Establishing a ‘Mackenzie Drylands Protected Area’, comprising publicly-owned land, to provide a core of highly protected land within the Basin
- Providing a long-term protective layer over private and pastoral leasehold land through the creation of a ‘Mackenzie Basin Heritage Landscape’ under new provisions for Heritage Landscape Orders inserted into the RMA or Conservation Act
- Providing supportive mechanisms for landowners and leaseholders within the Heritage Landscape through the activities of a community trust, tourism branding and priority government funding to support sustainable land management initiatives
- Providing independent oversight of agency performance in preserving the values of the Mackenzie Basin Heritage Landscape.

The Mackenzie report is available [here](#)

The Tourism report is available [here](#)