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Media release

EDS Calls for Environmental Stewardship and Planning Act to replace the RMA

EDS has today released a report outlining the key points of Phase 3 of its resource management system reform project. This looks at system reform through an urban lens – how it would play out in the context of our towns and cities. It calls for the creation of new legislation to replace the Resource Management Act.

Phase 3 builds upon the two previous phases of the work, which analysed the wider resource management system, outlined different options for change, and presented an overall preferred model for reform. These reports have informed the government’s independent system reform panel, chaired by the Hon Tony Randerson QC, whose final recommendations are yet to be released.

“The urban context of reform is crucial,” said senior researcher Dr Greg Severinsen.

“Alongside problems of housing affordability, infrastructure failings and other pressures of high growth, our cities are not working well for the environment or the climate. Our frameworks are not working well together, and there is now a great deal of complexity to the system. Something’s got to give.

“The Resource Management Act needs an overhaul. In previous work we’ve explored a number of fundamental changes that are needed but concluded that the basic framework could remain. On reflection, though, it’s become increasingly obvious that the extent of the change required really means this should be seen as something new, not just a deep round of amendments.

“We’ve got to rebuild our resource management system from the ground up.

“We’re calling this the Environmental Stewardship and Planning Act. The Act would have a different philosophical foundation to the RMA, which would flow through in the approach to its purpose and principles, national direction, and council planning and consenting processes.

“Our future system has got to be more agile, more integrated and above all it has to be more positively focused on achieving the cities we want rather than just stopping the things we don’t want. Environmental bottom lines are key to that. But at the same time, we don’t think it’s a good idea to split our legislation into separate statutes for planning and the environment. Integrated management is important.

“A replacement to the RMA would be supported by significant institutional change, too, including (among other things) local government structural reform, different settings for water service providers, a more active and integrated approach for central government, and the creation of a new, independent Futures Commission. And we can’t forget the importance of money. We’ve got to expand the toolbox for funding the infrastructure and services that support urban wellbeing and address the financial incentives and constraints that have held our cities back.

“Most of all, we think we need a proper legal framework for spatial planning that can tie all decision-making together, and which would present a green vision for how our cities grow and change over time,” Dr Severinsen concluded.

“This contribution, which has focused on the needs of towns and cities, completes 3 years of really deep and broad analysis about the failings of the present resource management system and what system reform is required for the next generation. We’d like to give special thanks again to the New Zealand Law Foundation and the Michael and Suzanne Borrin Foundation for their support of the project. The 3 major reports from EDS will hopefully contribute to the national conversation about the best way forward,” said EDS CEO Gary Taylor.

“We now await the Randerson Panel’s report on system reform which is expect in the next few days. We appear to have multi-party agreement on at least the need for fundamental reform. The next step will require some serious thinking, exploring the best way forward with intelligent and open minds and coming up with a depoliticised design for parliament to consider.

“Let’s take this opportunity to make deep and lasting positive change that protects our environment and enables sustainable economic activity,” concluded Mr Taylor.

For more information on the project, and to download or buy a hard copy of the summary report, see [RM Reform Project](#). The final report, a much larger piece of work, will be available on our website in early August.