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Media Release

EDS supports Green Party's Taonga Levy

At the EDS Conference *Wild Places* yesterday, the Green Party leader James Shaw announced a proposed *Taonga Levy*, which would be applied to international visitors at the border.

"We actually think this is an excellent idea and are pleased that the Prime Minister (and Minister of Tourism) seems open to the proposal. We also note that the Labour Leader has endorsed the initiative at our conference," said EDS Chairman Gary Taylor.

"The Greens propose a small levy of \$14-\$18 that would be spent on conservation management and on tourist and visitor facilities. This is consistent with our own advocacy on the need for additional funding for biodiversity.

"We applaud the Government's commitment to Predator Free New Zealand but clearly there will be much greater funding required to meet the 2025 and 2050 targets.

"And clearly there are a number of front-line visitor attractions that are under pressure from burgeoning numbers that need upgrading.

"The levy would bring in more than \$60 million annually and supplement Government revenues at a time when international visitor numbers are rapidly increasing and likely to tip over 4 million in the next couple of years.

"Our view is that the tourism sector needs to see this as an opportunity and not a threat. The sector needs to get more innovative and progressive in its policy advocacy. It is bemusing to us that the sector has not embraced the idea and seems actually to be opposed to it.

"The argument advanced by the Minister of Conservation that a levy would deter visitors is wrong. The recently imposed biosecurity levy had no discernible impact on visitor numbers and this one won't either.

"I think there's a great opportunity here for the border levy idea to get political traction and enable us to better funding for conservation and tourism," Mr Taylor concluded.