

# CONFERENCE REPORT HAMISH RENNIE\*

## REPORT ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENCE SOCIETY'S *REFORM IN PARADISE* CONFERENCE, AUCKLAND, 8-9 JUNE 2009



The EDS conference is one where the theme is set and speakers are invited by the EDS. This provides a cohesiveness and certainty of standard that ensures an interesting conference. That it is influential was demonstrated by the presence of reporters, including the Christchurch Press' environmental reporter, a large number of public servants known for their performance at the action end of the RMA, lobbyists, elected politicians and the present or past chief executives of regional councils and their staff.

The Minister for the Environment, Nick Smith, used the Conference to announce a new initiative, the establishment of a collaborative process spearheaded by the new Land and Water Forum which is tasked to reach a national consensus on outcomes and goals for water in twelve months. This Forum is an expansion of the Sustainable Land Use Forum originally established by the EDS at its 2008 conference.

Environment Canterbury was a major conference sponsor and it was not surprising that ECan's CEO Bryan Jenkins played a prominent role. Daniel Fiorino, a Director in the USA EPA was beamed in by satellite. Local 'stars' included Hugh Logan, formerly Secretary for the Environment and Director General of Conservation, and now a Lincoln University PhD student. The break-out sessions into three streams were not effective as no mechanism was used to summarise discussions for the main plenary.

The reform themes of the conference were dominated by discussion of the proposed Environmental Protection Agency, with an undercurrent of concern over the future of local government in the face of the restructuring of Auckland City. The debate was superbly set up by EDS's analysis of various EPA structures and the presence of current and former Australian state EPA CEOs and Ecologic's Guy Salmon. Gary Taylor's

(EDS) proposal for a Coastal Commission received short shrift from Minister Smith.

On the EPA, I was left with the impression that in one corner stood Guy Salmon, former environmentalist-cum-Blue Green National Party advisor, brusquely demonising farmers and their henchmen (regional councils), and advocating his Scandinavian solution – an EPA. Alongside him stood those seeking to curb the powers of local governments and those saying brands are important and an EPA is a recognisable 'brand' (although its shape and form varies considerably from EPA to EPA). In the middle were those, like the EDS, accepting the inevitability of an EPA, but trying to influence the scope of its activities, generally wishing to make it considerably more expansive and expensive than it appears the Government had intended. The third group, largely active, experienced RMA practitioners rather than theoreticians or lobbyists, appeared bemused and cynical. Their attitude was perhaps summed up by Adrienne Young Cooper's statement that the EPA was 'an answer looking for a question', and Jan Crawford arguing the RMA was fine as it is when the lag period for its implementation was considered. She considers the second generation plans are likely to be far more effective than the first. In the margins, an ex-DoC officer pondered the difference between 'conservation' and 'protection', and if the EPA was effective would it be rewarded with severe budget cuts.

I thoroughly enjoyed this conference and strongly urge people, especially planners, politicians and students, to read the conference papers posted on the EDS website: <http://www.edskonference.com/speakers.cfm>

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### NEXT ISSUE

*The next issue of LUPR is planned for January/February 2010. Articles for publication should be submitted by December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009 to Hamish Rennie, [lupr@lincoln.ac.nz](mailto:lupr@lincoln.ac.nz) (Please put 'LUPR' in the subject line).*

*If you have something to say about a current planning issue or a response to any of the articles in this issue we'd love to hear from you.*