



**FUTURE PROOFING FOR  
OUR GRANDCHILDREN, ONENUI  
STATION, TAWAPATA SOUTH INC.**

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STORYING KAITIAKITANGA: A KAUPAPA  
MĀORI LAND AND WATER FOOD STORY



**I THINK OUR FARMING NOW IS BASED ON BEING MORE ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE THAN MAYBE THEY USED TO BE IN THOSE DAYS. I HAD UNCLES THAT MADE A LIVING CUTTING DOWN THE ENVIRONMENT AND THEY WERE PAID BIG MONEY TO DO IT. AND NOW THEY'RE GROWING IT BACK. PAYING BIG MONEY TO DO IT. (BEN MACKEY, 2018).**

Chairperson Ben Mackey, Trustee Pat O'Brien, Trustee George Mackey, Onenui Station, Tawapapa South, Māhia, NZ, 2018

## HE KAUPAPA INTRODUCTION

How does a large-scale Māori beef and sheep farm on an East Coast peninsula manage its land-base for the benefit of its current shareholders, and the generations to come? This is the challenge facing one of the East Coast's last Māori-owned stations located on Te Māhia Peninsula. Diversifying land use for the benefit of both the environment and whānau is an important strategy for Onenui Station. Run by Tawapata South Incorporated, Onenui Station is made up of a 10,000 acre block and runs around 12,000 stock units. It is a breeding farm where about a third of the land is used for farming, while other sections are protected under Ngā Whenua Rāhui kawenata agreements with some coastal lands retired from farming to give shareholders better access to the sea. They have also set land aside for use by New Zealand's first commercial aerospace company, Rocket Lab. On January 21st 2017, Tawapata South's partner launched its second orbital launch vehicle from the headland of Onenui Station overlooking the island of Waikawa. Below, spokesperson for Tawapata South Inc., George Mackey, as well as his father Ben, Chairperson of Tawapata South, and Trustee Pat O'Brien, share insights on how they manage the farm on behalf of their approximately 2,000 shareholders.



(LEFT TO RIGHT): Yvonne Taura, Shareholder Mere Whaanga, Chairperson Ben Mackey, Trustee Pat O'Brien, Dr Jessica Hutchings, Dr Jo Smith, Onenui Station, Tawapapa South, Māhia, NZ, 2018

# HE KAWA KAITIAKITANGA VALUES



Ngahere, Native bush stands, Onenui Station, Tawapata South, Māhia, 2018

*I think our farming now is based on being more environmentally sensitive than maybe they used to be in those days. I had uncles that made a living cutting down the environment and they were paid big money to do it. And now they're growing it back. Paying big money to do it. (Ben Mackey, 2018)*

If the mainstay of New Zealand's economy was once the large-scale production of pastoral products and the land clearing practices needed to sustain such an industry, today's farmers are encouraged to be more mindful of the environmental and ecological impact of the work they do. Onenui Station is a good example of a Māori agribusiness working under current economic, cultural and environmental conditions. Work on Onenui Station includes contributing to biodiversity initiatives such

as native plantings and waterway protection and the Station is part of a broader, government-funded Hawkes Bay project to make Māhia predator-free by 2050. Pat is chair of the Whangawehi Catchment Group and has been involved in running predator control workshops to share trapping techniques. The initiative is not only about conserving the environment but also providing opportunities for community development and local employment more broadly. As Pat notes:

*The first stage of it is to eradicate the possums because they're currently in a suppressed state. But in doing that, we're trying a New Zealand first with wireless leg hold traps. We'll use a lot of different lures to attract different species such as ferrets, stoats and wild cats. They'll be checked on a daily basis and we're hoping to create some training and*

*more employment for people here. That's the focus for us. Anything we can do to improve housing and create employment will be beneficial. (Pat O'Brien, 2018)*

The large-scale predator-free project has not only attracted funding from the government, but also from some private sector oil and gas companies with an interest in funding biodiversity initiatives, looking to offset their impact on the environment and build their environmental reputation.

Receiving funding from an oil and gas company did not sit well for Ben and George. George reflects on one such hui attended by Ben, himself, and his son:

*I was wondering why the Regional Council had brought them in but they're going to be significant contributors to the project. Then we all started talking Dad and myself and my son Campbell. I said, "you know, we need to be really mindful about our Taranaki cousins who are battling with these guys and here we are, on this side of the motu, potentially going to be getting funding from them for the predator free project. [...] We're the only multiply-owned farm on the Māhia. We don't want our Taranaki whanaunga saying, "hey what's going on?". (George Mackey, 2018)*

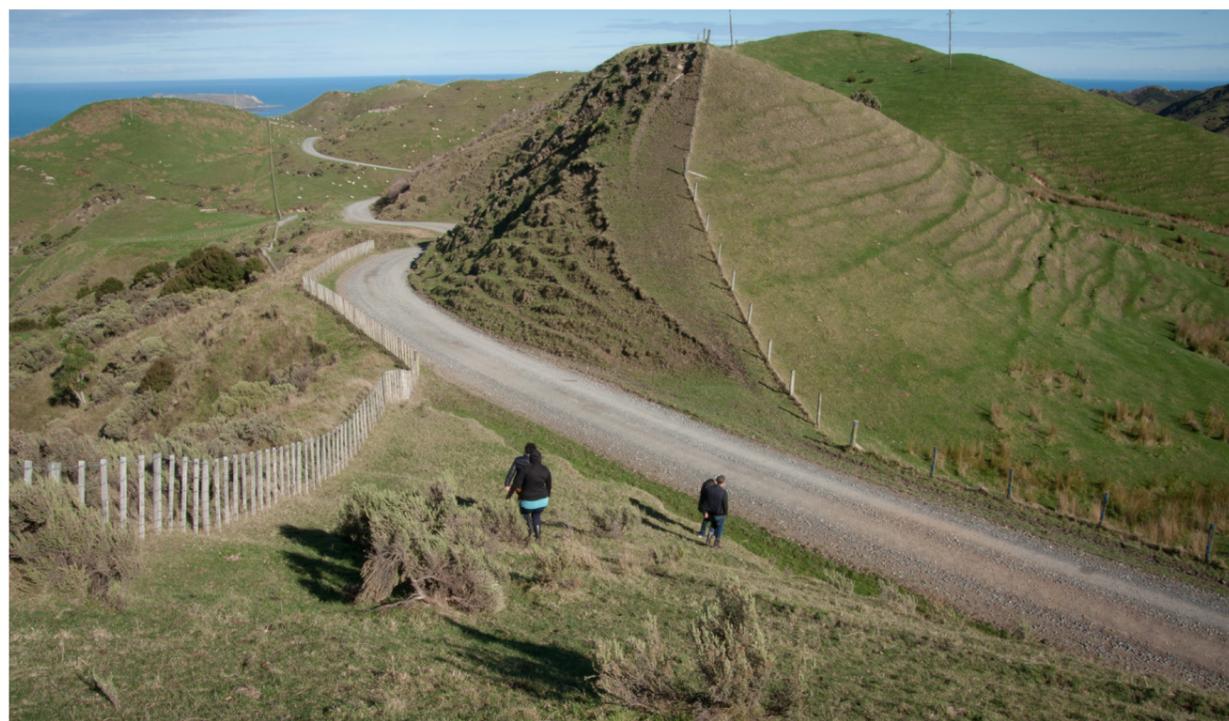
Being mindful of the kinds of collaborations Onenui Station gets involved in, is also at the forefront of Tawapata South Inc.'s relationship with Rocket Lab, a relationship forged on the agreement that the aerospace company ensures that it safeguards the surrounding environment and the many cultural sites of significance in the area. Rocket Lab's activities have also contributed to road upgrades, local employment opportunities and the company has donated 3D printers to Māhia school and it offers an annual tertiary scholarship to encourage Māhia students into engineering, science and technology.

## CHALLENGES

A current focus of the Station is to achieve "optimal operating potential" with debt reduction a key priority, as well as exploring market opportunities. Onenui Station has a great story to tell about its product, but there are some supply and demand challenges to face. As George notes, when reflecting on his encounter with celebrity chefs at a Hawkes Bay food event:

*So I started chatting away to them about the event and I said, "look guys, we've got lamb that comes down at low tide and they go out on to the reef and eat the karengo. This flavours the meat so you don't have to add salt". They said, "look, send us some lamb and we'll trial it in the restaurant". And we got it down to them. In short they said, "Great, this stuff is beautiful and we want it, but all we want are the shanks and the racks". So, what do we do with the rest of the lamb?*

George describes this encounter as their foray into what one whānau member calls "from the nuku to the puku", (from Papatūānuku to the stomach) - a food supply system that provides a Māori riff on the phrase, "from farm to fork", or from "paddock to plate".<sup>1</sup> George suggests a collective approach is needed in order to meet the demands of markets. The kaupapa of Māhia as predator-free could be a significant platform for building a brand for food production on the peninsula. This would require a change in farming systems and a revival of former efforts to develop some economies of scale that can harness the region's potential. Technology also has a role to play in the future developments of the Station as well as the possibility of ecotourism. According to Ben, George and Pat, Onenui Station is at an exciting time in its development, with all decisions and future aspirations aligned with the task of future-proofing the whenua for the generations to come.



TOP IMAGE: Left to Right - Shareholder Richard Allen, Trustee George Mackey, Rocket lab employee, Chairperson Ben Mackey, 2018

BASE IMAGE: Onenui Station Road. IMAGE RIGHT: Waikawa Island, Onenui Station, Tawapata South, Māhia, 2018

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See [our website](#) for more info on the Storying Kaitiakitanga project.

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<sup>1</sup> Nuku ki te Puku is also Callaghan Innovation's Māori Economy programme headed by Hemi Rolleston. See <https://www.callaghaninnovation.govt.nz/accelerate-april-2016/nuku-ki-te-puku>.

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# HE RANGAI MAOMAO KA TAKA I TUA O NUKUTAURUA, E KORE A MURI E HOKIA A SHOAL OF MAOMAO THAT HAS ONCE TURNED ROUND THE POINT NUKUTAURUA WILL NEVER TURN BACK.

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OUR LAND  
AND WATER

Toitū te Whenua,  
Toiora te Wai

National  
**SCIENCE**  
Challenges

