

Working for Lake Rerewhakaaitu

The Pacey Family

FARM SIZE: 116 Hectares

LOCATION: Rerewhakaaitu

NO COWS: 330



Family safeguards their dairying future

Because of their strong attachment to the land, Mac and Lynda Pacey are always challenging themselves to do better on their farm for the sake of the Lake.

The couple has lived in Rerewhakaaitu since 1981 when they moved from share milking in the Hauraki Plains to buying their first farm by the Lake – 54 hectares on which they milked 120 cows.

They joined a strong community of young farmers – some of who were also first-time farm owners setting out on a dairying career.

While the lower price of land was certainly a major factor, the Lake was equally as appealing to the keen outdoor couple who loved waterskiing.

“We were all in the same boat – and the Lake was an added bonus,” Mac says.

“We all got on with each other and we would spend hours on the Lake. We would milk in the morning, then head off to the Lake, ski all day. We would pick up the kids from school and take them to the Lake and then go home to milk at night. It was wonderful.”

Over time, the pressure to grow their business resulted in many of the young farmers buying out neighbouring farms.

The Paceys amalgamated with the neighbouring farm, increasing their land to 116-hectares and 330 cows.

Their sights were set on productivity and profitability and while the Lake was ‘just gold’ to their way of life, Mac admits that environmental issues were not high on the radar.

Besides, in those days the Lake water was good – so good that the Paceys pumped their household drinking water straight from the Lake.

In the late 1990s awareness changed. As the waters of the Rotorua lakes came under the microscope due to algae blooms and deteriorating quality, the pressure came from the Regional Council for all farmers in the Rotorua area to take a closer look at the way they farmed and how they dealt with effluent discharge and nutrient run-off.

“Suddenly water quality started to be an issue. We did not want to be non-profitable but neither did we want our

Lake to go bad. So since then we have found ways to change our farming practices, keep our lovely Lake, keep skiing on it and keep farming to the best of our ability,” Mac says.

“We believed that if we were not vigilant someone would come in and start regulating us.”

The Paceys have been strong proponents of Project Rerewhakaaitu from day one and both are active members on the committee.

“We have always been involved purely for the reason to have a nice Lake and continue to farm. We could not do it on our own. If we as farmers are affecting the waterways, we have to be seen to be doing as much as we can to improve the water quality,” Mac says.

The Paceys believe that working together with Bay of Plenty Regional Council has been a key to the project’s success and has served as a valuable resource for information.



"Our son and grandchildren are here – so we are prepared to do as much as we can."

"Everyone is keen to prove that we can farm here. Bay of Plenty Regional Council has been tremendously kind to us. It annoys me when people say that the Regional Council are just the police - we (Project Rerewhakaaitu) have a tremendous relationship with them."

Mitigation practices

The PACEYS used to be one of the higher users of phosphates and nitrogen (200 units of nitrogen per year), simply because that was what the agricultural consultants were telling them.

"We felt that if we kept piling on more and more phosphate we would keep growing more grass – but we found that it doesn't work like that," Mac says.

Since working with Project Rerewhakaaitu they have changed many farming practices, including using phosphate rock instead of superphosphate.

"We are trying to be more bio-organic in our fertiliser use."

Mac explains: "We got rid of nitrogen for two years and used foliar sprays but we were never brave enough to take out nitrogen and phosphate totally. We are very conscious about fertiliser applications."

Under the OVERSEER® nutrient budget regime, the PACEYS apply

nitrogen in August and April and, depending on the weather, in May but they do not use it in June and July. They have reduced nitrogen applications from their original 200 units per year to just 60 units a year.

Other mitigation measures include reducing cow numbers by 50 and using a feed pad for the cows to stand off the pasture and on which to collect effluent. This, Mac says, has had a big effect on the OVERSEER® programme in lowering nutrients. They also winter off half their cows in another catchment.

They have put in a pond, a sump and are looking at more alternatives for improving their effluent treatment and discharge to get to an even higher standard.

Future proofing the lake

Asked why he thinks Lake Rerewhakaaitu is holding its own in terms of water quality, Mac says the shallowness of the Lake could be a factor, causing groundwater to miss entering it.

"Or it could be because we are good farmers – but I don't know if we could take the claim for that just yet," Mac says. "I would say there are farmers in other parts of the Rotorua catchment being equally as pro-active as we are in Rerewhakaaitu."

While the majority of farmers are working with Project Rerewhakaaitu,

Mac would like to see the handful who are not consider getting involved.

"We cannot make them join the project – but we are hoping that they will come on board with peer pressure."

Mac explains: "If it gets to the point where farmers aren't doing the right thing it would have to be Bay of Plenty Regional Council that stepped in."

Where to from here

"We don't need to push the boundaries any more," Mac says. "Over the years we have tried all the tricks in the trade to get heaps of money out of dairying – urea, high stocking rates, nitrogen trials and we have always had a farm consultant."

"We got to a point where it became more important for me to stay enjoying farming."

Mac and Lynda are now looking forward to their son (who is contract milking on the farm) taking up the reins.

"You get pretty attached to your land," Mac says. "We are trying to safeguard our right to dairy here so that we can be a profitable little business, still have a lovely Lake and be left alone."