

## Case Study

# Farmers learn about protecting Māori food sources

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CATEGORY: Stories | Zone Committee | Environment | Ngāi Tahu | Water Quality | Farming | Water

ZONE: SELWYN WAIHORA

Protection of mahinga kai is enshrined in the Canterbury Water Management Strategy, under which Canterbury is divided into 10 catchment zones, each with its own challenges. Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere is in the Selwyn Waihora zone.

The lake has huge significance to Ngāi Tahu historically and as a place to gather food but today it is seriously polluted, with much of that blamed on farming. Under the Selwyn Te Waihora Water Plan, a Cultural Landscape Values Management Area has been established around the lake and farmers within this now have to include mahinga kai targets in their farm environment plans.

Mahinga kai is a broad concept that includes species, natural habitats, materials traditionally used for harvesting food and places where food or resources are gathered.

There are about 150 properties in the lake zone affected and another 200 within 20 metres of several waterways that flow into the lake. Farmers will be required to protect mahinga kai, which for some will mean fencing waterways and excluding stock.

As part of its effort to explain the new rules to farmers, Environment Canterbury has appointed a cultural land management advisor (Poū Matai Kō), Mananui Ramsden.

“I was raised in a family that have long been involved with cultural awareness and rūnanga and tribal level politics. It’s been a part of my upbringing,” says Mananui.

Selwyn Waihora zone manager Michaela Rees understands Environment Canterbury is the first council in New Zealand to appoint a cultural land management advisor and she says it’s important to have people who can build relationships in the community.

“Mananui’s role is to engage with landowners, farm managers, different industry groups, people who are affected, so they can understand what mahinga kai is and then what that means for them on-farm.”

Six months into the job, Mananui says it’s an exciting opportunity to help and be part of change in Canterbury.

“The most important part of the job is understanding context, understanding how we’ve arrived here and all the different legislative

plan changes and water management strategies and building relationships so we can discuss those.”

Mananui has already organised two “shed talks” meetings where farmers have been shown how protecting mahinga kai has been incorporated successfully on-farm.

Mananui has now met many farmers who are sceptical about the new rules and unfamiliar with mahinga kai concepts.

“For our farming friends, mate this is the first time, unless they’ve seen it on the news or their kids come home singing a waiata.

“When I turn up on-farm it’s starting a relationship, ‘This is who I am, let’s talk.’ I sit there and listen and the first thing that comes out is emotion, followed by a little bit of pointing. ‘Aren’t you Ngāi Tahu? Well, this is the first time we’ve ever seen you, where have you been?’

A few farmers have suggested, bluntly, that he leaves. “I know where I stand with that, the first engagement has started and we just keep those relationships warm, it’s a phone call, it’s a text message.”

But he says the “tough ones” are a small percentage and most people are welcoming. “I’ve had the narrow-mindedness but socially that starts getting ruled out by their own peers saying, ‘Hang on, we actually need this, because unless you’re an expert on mahinga kai, do you know what this means?’

“The lightbulb moments go when they understand what kaitiakitanga means, stewardship, or manaaki, to support, or rangatiratanga, leadership. These are all values that are present today and have been for generations, in both cultures with different names. Once you get the opportunity to talk about it, that’s when we grow.

“All they need is an understanding of what mahinga kai is, what it looks like on-farm, and how we can support them with this land use consent process as a zone delivery team.”

Mananui is quick to acknowledge that farmers, like Ngāi Tahu, embrace their role as guardians of the resources on their land and they are already implementing good management practices which will have a direct impact on water quality and, in turn, mahinga kai values.