



Mr Robin Peehi

A void was left in the Morikaunui and Atihau-Whanganui Maori land incorporations when the chairman of both, Dr Rangi Mete-Kingi, died last year.

The question was not simply who would replace him but how could he be replaced.

Earlier this year Mr Robin Peehi, of Karioi, accepted the job of heading the two Wanganui incorporations, with a combined worth of \$8 million.

Dr Mete-Kingi was reknowned for his ability and high personal standing. However, Mr Peehi does not feel daunted by Dr Mete-Kingi's reputation.

"As far as I'm concerned I can do it. If people don't think I will measure up they are jumping the gun a bit," he told Tu Tangata.

Mr Peehi is used to meeting challenges head on. In 1951 he returned to Karioi to family land, after a decade working in the New Zealand Dairy Company's Tirau factory.

"The place we came back to had really reverted to bush. "I wondered whether I had chosen to do the right thing."

Sort of farming

"During that time we were sort of farming ... but not legally.

Besides that we had to travel all over the place to find the different owners of the different blocks and that takes up time.

I was fairly confident it would come right but you are never fully confident until things are done.

Legally it wasn't too difficult but you had to go all over the place and that took time and money."

And money was scarce.

None of the 195 acres was in production but there was a good two-bedroom house and he had 100 sheep, given to him by his wife's father — the late Dr Mete-Kingi's uncle.

For 10 years the family struggled. Mr Peehi cleared the land himself and earned money doing casual work. It took three years to get all the signatures so the land could be signed over.

Round the clock

"You didn't work the land full-time — you had to live. You did seasonal work. I used to shear and go harvesting for the big farmers. I did a whole lot of things, all related to farming.

That's the way we did it. When we had the time we were scrub-cutting and cultivating the land.

It was real hard work but we enjoyed it. We had no time to travel. You worked round the clock.

When I finished work I didn't want to go anywhere. Very rarely did we go in to town — that's Ohakune.

I would say that our income (from the farm) was virtually nothing. What little we got we always returned back. What we wanted personally we had to go out and work for.

Mrs Te Uta Peehi said: "We were fairly self-sufficient. We had our own garden, we had fowls, we had cows we used to milk. I buy my milk in town now, more's the pity.

We didn't do too badly, really. But when it came to money, we didn't have any."

Two hands

They were given their first 100 sheep but buying further stock was a problem.

Mr Peehi recalls: "We had no money.

It was like everything else, you soon scout around and get some. I earned most of it and got some finance through stock firms. It was the only way. When I approached them they said: 'You get the stock'."

Mrs Peehi remembers the approach to the stock firm representative: "Robin said: "This is all I've got for collateral, my two hands'.

"That's the guy who gave us the start. And that's the first white man we ever knew."

Nowadays, the Peehi's outlook is rosier. Their new house is on an impressive rise, possibly the prime site in the district.

The picture window in the dining room looks out over the new woolshed toward Mt Ruapehu, which dominates the scene. However, the important mountain (a hill really) to the Peehi's is off to the right.

Te Kaahu

It is Te Turi O Murimotu and it is Mr Peehi's mountain, Tiorangi is his marae and Ngatirangi his tribe.

Their 100 sheep now number 4500, plus 700 cattle. And their 195 acres, 2000 acres.

"We started coming right in the early '60s" said Mr Peehi. "We became a company then became the Te Kaahu Trust."

Te Kaahu was Mr Peehi's great-grandfather, from whom their land came.

"The story as it was told to me was that three males were chosen from the Wanganui River to come back and stake their claims to their land. They had to remain here," he said.

Mrs Peehi said: "They were to die here. He was the only one to fulfil that. I suppose that's why we are here." She said they were proud of the name Kaahu or hawk.

Two committees

"We have got those touches of intrigue and deviousness," she said. "It's my white blood that allows me to say a thing like that."

Mr Peehi has been a committee member of the Atihau-Whanganui Incorporation since it started and a committee member of the Morikaunui Incorporation for one year.

As the two committees are run side-by-side his responsibility has always been with both. That is emphasised by his position as committee member responsible for the Morikaunui Station for the last five years.

Mr Peehi said he was not planning major changes for the incorporations. The ground-work had been done and it was his job to develop that.

Above all he was responsible to the wishes and needs of incorporation members. He said Mrs Peehi was a shareholder and she was quick to voice her opinion about executive decisions.