



Cairns Post Wednesday 11/08/2010

Page: 21
Section: General News
Region: Cairns QLD, AU
Circulation: 25626
Type: Regional
Size: 361.50 sq.cms.

Cutting edge fibre

AN Australian company with a small factory on the Atherton Tableland believes its cutting-edge technology has the capacity to make the panelboard and veneer industry environment-friendly.

It also believes it has the power to bring jobs and incomes to banana-growing communities around the world.

Papyrus Australia holds a patented technology that converts banana-trunk waste into alternatives for timber-based products.

It has a long-term plan to license its system offshore on the back of strong initial interest in its products from Europe and the Middle East.

The depth of interest was gauged last year when Papyrus unveiled its Beleaf-branded banana-trunk veneer and fibreboard products at the Monaco Yacht Show, Europe's premier trade show for furniture, panelling, flooring and other architectural products.

Martin Rasini

editorial@tcp.newsltd.com.au

Ted Byrt, chairman of Papyrus which last month won the 2010 Australian Business Award for Innovation, says the purpose of exhibiting at the Monaco show was to test the market for the company's veneer and panelboard products.

"The interest was exceptional, particularly from The Netherlands and other northern European countries, and revealed strong demand for two product lines; veneer sheets for furniture, and a panelboard substitute for particle-board, chipboard and other timber-based materials," he said.

"However, at the time we were not able to produce panelboard in commercial quantities. That has been our focus for the past year and we are now close to commissioning and trialling a panelboard machine at our Walkamin factory.

"We are confident that, after the trials, we will be able to manufacture panelboard of varying densities."

The banana-trunk technology has been developed by Ramy Azer, a mechanical engineer and founder of Papyrus Australia, who in the mid-1990s began investigating "green" fibres and manufacturing processes to provide alternatives for wood-based products.

He formed the Adelaide-based Papyrus Australia in 2004 and it listed in 2005.

The company's products use organic glues and are fire retardant and water resistant.

Mr Byrt says commissioning of the panelboard machine is part of a plan to make the Walkamin factory a showpiece for the Papyrus technology.

"The Walkamin plant has a single cutting machine and the next step is a factory with five cutting machines, to be built in Australia or Egypt," he said.



Environment friendly: The cutting machine at the Walkamin plant will be expanded to five to help produce banana-based alternatives (inset) to timber-based products