



FULLY FRANK

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Taking a punt on fish farms

LAS Vegas is one of those strange cities where trucks arrive full and leave empty.

More than 39 million punters each year come to Vegas and they all have to eat, drink, gamble and stay in bizarre hotels for a few days until they leave.

If Paul Hopper has his way, many of the punters, and at least some of the empty trucks, will leave loaded with fresh Australian barramundi grown in a massive production facility.

When it is up and running, the Cell Aquaculture fish farm could produce more than 600 tonnes of fish a year.

"The demand for farmed fish is only heading on one direction as pressure on wild fisheries continues," said Paul yesterday.

"We think Las Vegas will be a perfect place to operate because there is a large market for seafood and cheap transport into the massive Californian market."

Paul should know, he chairs the

company from San Diego and has been part of a rapid change in direction for Cell.

Initially the company sold and installed its modular aquaculture technology around the world.

Now the focus has changed to growing commercial quantities of fish itself, as well as supplying fish farms around the world with equipment.

That has led to the closure of a small demonstration facility in Mississippi with the equipment shipped to Las Vegas.

The company headquarters are in Perth which looks after the manufacturing and research and development.

A barramundi hatchery in Townsville is attached to James Cook University while a 70 tonne facility in Holland is the first step in

a farm that's planned to provide at least 400 tonnes a year.

Cell also holds 27 per cent of a joint venture with the Malaysian state

government in Terengganu which is about to open a 100 tonne a year farm.

This can be expanded to 900 tonnes a year.

Potentially a very valuable addition is a 50 per cent owned hatchery which can produce fingerlings of a wide variety of premium fish including several varieties of grouper.

Business development manager Peter Burns said one advantage of Cell's modular equipment was that it was easily scalable by adding extra production cells and the filtration and water treatment made the process clean and green.

Nitrogen rich waste from the fish tanks had even been used successfully for growing vegetables.

Paul said Cell would continue to look at opportunities for expansion, particularly in the US and Europe.

Cell Aquaculture shares closed steady at 18¢.



Hooked: Las Vegas gamblers will soon dine on farmed barramundi.