



Cell expands but Freo's still home

Janelle Macri

FREMANTLE-BASED barramundi producer Cell Aquaculture Ltd insists it will remain a Western Australian company despite the appointment of three overseas-based directors.

The global expansion of the company to incorporate production facilities in Europe, the US and Malaysia has resulted in the appointment of on-the-ground directors on each continent, following the departures of chairman Robert Sewell, non-executive director Rocky De Nys and chief executive Geoff Leding Wilton in the past month.

Malaysian-based shareholder-turned-director, Suresh E Abishegam, played a pivotal role in the development of the company's 3,000 square metre Malaysian production facility, successfully negotiating a joint venture deal with the Malaysian government.

The construction of the Malaysian facility has been fast-tracked, with stage one of the large-scale production facility coming online in October 2007, upscaling to full production – about 700 tonnes a year – 18 months later.

The company is also examining the possibility of expanding on its original plans for the facility, located adjacent to the Federal Marine Institute, to incorporate multi-species hatcheries.

London-based director, investment banker Glyn Tonge, will lead its expansion into Europe and pursue a possible AIM listing currently being considered by the board.

Newly appointed US-based director Paul Hopper will oversee the development of a proposed production facility in Mississippi.

Mr Hopper will also usher in the company's ADR program in the US, sponsored by the Bank of New York, allowing shares in the company to be



Peter Burns

bought over-the-counter in that country.

WA-based director Peter Burns, who has been with the company since its inception and a director since its listing on the ASX two years ago, admitted that expanding the business internationally was a challenge while based in Fremantle.

However, the appointment of directors at each regional hub would facilitate rapid growth in each strategic region.

"Our aim was to have a footprint in each key market, and we wanted to expand on that, and it's hard when you're based in WA when the opportunities are overseas," he told *WA Business News*.

Mr Burns said the transition following the board restructure was a smooth one, and the company was now assessing its options for raising capital for the expansions of its facilities, either through its overseas-based subsidiaries, or through the parent company.

"We have secured the right people to grow with us," he said.