Geelong's green future

Locally made processor promises to transform viability of textile hemp

GEELONG could soon add hemp capital of the world to its list of accomplishments, according to Textile and Composite Industries managing director Adrian Clarke.

"What will make the difference is a machine designed by Mr Clarke that is set to be mass-produced by North Geelong engineering company Astamag.

"We have lots of people in Europe mainly, but also in America and Canada, who want to buy our textile hemp. But first they want to know we are able to produce it in large enough quantities," Mr Clarke said. "With this machine being mass produced, we will be able to..."

Mr Clarke described the machine as a "decopter" designed by Mr Clarke after two decades in the hemp industry, and proven to be successful with a prototype made by an engineering firm in Barmulloch.

"Now we have a good idea of what it will look like," Mr Clarke said.

Mr Clarke said the machine would be able to produce hemp in large quantities, allowing for more widespread use of the material.

"We are looking at a plant producing thousands of hectares of hemp per year," Mr Clarke said. "Our machine is the size of a two-bedroom house. You can cut the hemp in the morning and spin it in the afternoon."

"Instead of losing 90 per cent of the textile quality fibre, we lose only two per cent. If you grow three tonnes of fibre from one hectare because that's what you can get from a hectare - you will get nearly three tonnes at the end of the process."

Mr Clarke is planning to take the machine to a spinner in the country - there are no such machines in Australia - and he has a team of accomplished people with skills in spinning who would be able to set up an industry that is languishing and died.

"Hemp is a fibre known for its strength - somewhere between fibreglass and carbon fibre."

"There are a lot of uses for it, as a rope and on groves, floorboards and superlight car bodies, and we have had a lot of interest in what we are doing," he said.

"Hemp was expected to grow as a crop in 1998. Only after convincing evidence indicated the hemp contained such minuscule amounts of THC, the element that provides the high, that it posed no threat."

For woolgrowers plantations provide a cover for a few weeks, to manage plantings given that even a tiny amount of hemp pollen can weaken wool in sheep. The major crop of cannabis plants creates an inferior product for generations of the plant to come."