

THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT FOR ANDZAC GROUP

A new energy-efficient aeration machine is creating waves in the wastewater industry, writes Hugh Fagan.

Andzac Group may have only been around for five years, but its pontoon-mounted aeration machine, the Andzac Aerator, is set to have a significant impact on the wastewater industry. This innovative aerator has a power consumption of just 2.2kW (compared to traditional aerators that have a consumption of 22kW), making it more power efficient – and more affordable – than its rival products. As a case in point, Goulburn Valley Water is set to save over 600,00kWh and around \$80,000 per year using the machine, and the dairy industry and the Australian Prawn Farmers Association in Queensland have also expressed interest.

Andzac Group grew off the back of Director Andrew Nicol's 35 years of experience as a plumber, and after a visit to a wastewater treatment plant in 2009. The company was born. The idea for the aerator was conceived after Andrew saw an old, broken-down traditional low-speed mechanical surface aerator at the plant. Someone made a passing comment that whoever could make the traditional surface aerator more efficient would stand to make a lot of money and Andrew acted on the idea quickly. In between working as a full-time plumber he developed a 'proof of concept', creating an initial prototype that was tested in the Edwards Lake Reservoir with local council approval. Andrew realised he had identified a niche in the market and a way to enable more efficient water aeration.

The Andzac Aerator was in the prototype stage for three years and Andzac Group is still constantly refining it. Based in Thornburg, Victoria, the company has recently moved into a new warehouse where it is building a custom testing tank to further the development of the aerator.

"The product's evolution is going to be an ongoing thing," says Andrew. "Andzac Group is always tweaking models aiming for better mixing and oxygen results."

Getting to this point hasn't necessarily been an easy journey for Andzac Group though. Reluctance on behalf of a conservative water industry to try new products proved to be a significant barrier in securing interest and support. Andrew also makes the point that it can be difficult to reach contacts within water utilities and the water industry in general, as there is a resistance to talk to new companies.



Andzac Aerator installation at Kyabram for Goulburn Valley Water.

Andzac Group employed pure perseverance to overcome these barriers. After all, as Andrew says: "If you think you have a good product you have to prepare to be around for the long haul. You can't take no for an answer."

Andrew's persistence paid off. After attending as many trade exhibitions and innovation forums as their budget would allow they began to create positive connections with people who could help take Andzac Group to the next level.

The company still faced one final hurdle – proving that their aerator technology actually worked. Andrew stresses that the ability to pitch is crucial, as potential investors or people of interest will usually not take phone calls and it is often hard to get the right email address or point of contact. Successful pitches have led to trials with Goulburn Valley Water. Andrew also recommends organisations like the Australian Water Association and Water Services Association of Australia, which he believes ensures you get in front of the right people.

Recent trials resulted in Andzac Group's first two sales, which were quickly followed by others. They intend to take the aerator overseas and hope that their custom-built developing tank will enable further efficiencies that have never been achieved in jet aeration. Andzac Group is also in the process of designing a solar package and is investigating new technologies in the solar/battery area to enable even more power efficiencies. As sales grow and Andzac Group becomes more financially independent from the plumbing business, funds will be reinvested in the aerator to further growth by attending trade shows and getting the product in front of the right audience.

Andzac Group is one of the technology companies taking part in the Australian Water Association's Incubator Programme, which is sponsored by Industry Capability Network (ICN), PwC and ANZ. The 12-month Programme provides innovators with a range of tailored business-to-business meetings, and myriad opportunities to promote their products to the water industry and water-using industries. Andzac Group will showcase their product at the Australian Water Association's Innovation Forum at Royal Randwick Racecourse in Sydney 10 – 11 March 2016. To find out more about the Innovation Incubator Programme and the Innovation Forum email jmoulin@awa.asn.au



The Andzac Aerator in operation at Kyabram.