

Inventor makes a splash

Alex Tilbury

JOE Spelta dove in the pool at the deep end, but it is paying off with his chemical-free fresh water swimming pool technology.

When he first started talking about his dream to invent the world's first truly chemical-free fresh water swimming pool for a tropical climate, he was laughed at.

Five years later, Mr Spelta and his team have patented the invention, launched it to market as the EcoSplash System "living water" pool, formed two new companies, secured sales, identified additional applications for the "green" technology and started talks with potential investors.

He has done this with the help of the AIC's Innovation Coaching program – a joint initiative between the Australian Institute for Commercialisation and the Queensland Government Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation.

The coaching program is a key element of the Queensland Wide Innovation Network and has been designed to help companies become more innovative and develop sustainable, competitive advantages.

The potential of EcoSplash was identified in 2009 when AIC Innovation coach Robert Buhrke visited the Cairns showroom of Mr Spelta's family business Placid Pools – and noticed a swimming pool with abundant wildlife along-



LAST LAUGH: Placid Pool's Joe Spelta has defied the sceptics and turned his dream into reality.

side the conventional and chemical-based pools.

He realised the company could be eligible for a research and development tax concession and qualify for the coaching program.

Placid Pools had been experimenting with using aquatic plants as water filters to decrease salinity, energy and water use since 2005.

"But no one, not even the Europeans, thought we could

make it work in the tropics," Mr Spelta said.

The next steps involved business structuring and marketing.

The AIC was able to introduce them to the best advisers.

By the end of last year, two spin-off companies started – EcoSplash Living Waters Pty Ltd, which installs pools, and Natural Water Technologies Pty Ltd, which holds the intellectual property.

"The EcoSplash system also increases a pool's biodiversity, fish can swim in it and the fresh water and aquatic plants attract butterflies and dragonflies," Mr Spelta said.

"Customers who want the eco-credentials without the wildlife can have a separate natural filter using aquatic plants, which just looks like an attractive water feature."

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