

LIQUID GOLD



Aqueous Solutions' Matthew Harrison.
Picture: NICOLE SULTANA

BUSINESS WEST

BY CHARLENE GATT

AS FAR as Matthew Harrison is concerned, water is the oil of the 21st Century.

It's easy to see why.

While many businesses floundered during the drought at the turn of the millennium, Mr Harrison used his skills and know-how to capitalise on putting out alternative sources of water through his Newport company, Aqueous Solutions.

The business is a design, manufacturing and servicing company that for the past 11 years has provided customised water desalination equipment, reverse osmosis and waste water treatment across Australia.

It currently completes up to 50 projects a year, with lots of work from sporting clubs, schools, wineries, and some residential jobs.

Some of Aqueous Solutions' biggest projects include providing solar desalination for Brisbane City Council, setting up water desalination equipment at Polymetals White Dam gold mine and work on the Wonthaggi Desalination Plant.

When Business West visited in August, the company was giving quotes to look after the municipal supply of water to New Guinea.

It has also supplied numerous other overseas quotes, with a vision to have plants in New Guinea, Africa, South America and the Middle East in coming years.

Mr Harrison also believes the company is at the forefront of bore water extractions.

"We're ground breaking in the amount of bore water being extracted," he said.

"Normally, on a good day, you'll get 75 to 80 per cent as good water coming out of that - we're getting 94 per cent. I'm not aware of any other plant in the world getting that high a recovery."

A chemical engineer by trade, Mr Harrison started to take an interest in water and waste water treatment systems while working for BHP.

Part of his role involved setting up a desalination plant to get the water supply for one of BHP's big projects.

It was new technology at the time, so the company sent Mr Harrison around the world looking at different plants and speaking to a range of experts.

The experience spawned a business plan.

"The drought started to bite," Mr Harrison said.

"I knew about groundwater, there was lots of groundwater, but it was mainly salty.

"I knew the technology to take the salt out, so I built a small machine, ran an ad in the Weekly Times, and went to the field days, and it went from there. It was scary.

"I'd always wanted to do it (have my own business), so I made that speech to the boss that everyone wants to make at some stage and woke up the next morning and thought 'what have I done? There was no going back.'"

He started off recycling waste water.

It was technology that was ahead of its time and, working from home, business was slow to begin.

Business began to boom after a Melbourne daily newspaper covered one of his projects at a piggery in Winchelsea.

"The phone went crazy, and that raised our profile," Mr Harrison said.

Since then, the business has moved out of home and has steadily picked up bigger jobs.

Mr Harrison is looking at new premises, with business too busy for their current site. **[BW]**