

Is that a rocket launch pad at Old Bynoe Road?

Tau Industries and Spirulina

There is absolutely no truth to the rumour the Taiwanese are building an aerospace launch pad in Old Bynoe Road, Livingstone!

The extraordinary 30 metre tower and great acreage of pondage are largely the product of a single man's intense vision - his name is Bell Huang.

Some would could his vision a madness, others an obsession - he thinks it's just taking one step at a time.

Taiwanese Bell must be one of the last Australian pioneers, it's hard to imagine too many Top Enders doing what he has done.

He's taken 250 acres of our hot, harsh bush and is building an immense high tech industry - growing an obscure crop called spirulina.

Spirulina has been a minor health food fad in Australia for the last ten years or so - it's a single-celled, spiral, blue green algae that grows in tropical salt water lakes.

It's small - a microscopic crop in fact. Its high chlorophyll content is claimed to help hypertension and chronic gastro intestinal disorders, the spirulina world niche market is therefore far sized and the Taiwanese have cornered most of it.

The problem is, land in Taiwan is no longer cheap - those vast acres of pond could be sold for real estate development.

Enter electrical engineer Bell Huang, nephew of Taiwanese Spirulina Grand Master, Mr Chung Yuan Huang.

Spirulina needs capital input (around \$4-5M), some secret knowledge, lots of land, clean air, water, warmth and sunshine.

Between the NT, an uncle, a cousin and Bell, everything seemed covered.

The project has been some five years in the making, with the first few years dedicated to the issues involved in importing the blue green algal livestock - microscopic it may be, but livestock it is.

In these early years, Cousin Terry Huang



Bell Huang, Shortie, Matt and the drying tower

covered the paperwork, then Bell's work began.

Now Bell has his subcontractors and workers - there's five working directly for him and Bell wishes to express his appreciation of their work, especially to Humpty Doo Shorty, Livingstone Mat, Steven and Gary.

Together they built the sheds, the 16 sets of 6 ponds, the filters, the automated water cycling and the drying tower.

"Without their help I have no chance of survival to now," he said. But those workers and

subcontractors all get weekends off, and of course manager and shareholder Bell doesn't.

He obviously works and works and, in his very Taiwanese way, is a bit perplexed about why other Top Enders do not work as hard as he does.

He's having trouble understanding the failure of equipment to appear on time, skill shortages and other such things.

That super high tech \$1.5M vacuum drier is behind schedule and Bell desperately wants that first load of spirulina flying out on its way to Taiwan for repackaging ASAP.

You can feel his tension - hi debts, hi tech and hi work load all draining the man.

And through it all he is courteous, friendly and full of information - a good man, agreed all the workers and contractors - with an innovative idea that really seems to be happening.

As one of his subbies said "I've never seen anything like this before, and I've been around

this sort of industry just isn't here."

Says another "It will happen, hard to say when, we're looking forward to seeing our ponds full of green vision."

Some questions

Will the spirulina run away?

"No, spirulina can't live in freshwater and even in salt water it would be out-competed by other organisms without correct growing conditions," said Bell.

But as Diana Rickard, Independent candidate for Goydor electorate said "If fish can fall out of the sky, why shouldn't blue green algae?"

She also worries that a major wet season spillage could reach brackish water, as many NT large scale aqua culture ventures in the NT have failed due to either lack of resources or poor management.

The key question is, even if the blue green algae does escape, and live, will it be successful and will it do harm?

Of course, we do not know, but there are many very similar biovars of spirulina around our parts it seems.

Does the process pollute?

"Not much, it's a clean industry - the nutrients added are like fish farm nutrient and is all recycled, the algae produce oxygen as by product, no poisons or herbicides are used and power for the drying plant will be LPG."

Will the process work?

Bell and workers claim it's definitely almost there, the impediment has been the solitude of an unusual man in a strange place - Bell has felt lonely at times.

Will Bell have a party after first harvest?

No - he's just not that sort, rather, his dream is to have the process so automated he can holiday in Taiwan.

Soon, Old Bynoe Road may be producing the highest quality spirulina in the world, a major export industry is soon to achieve take-off.

Maybe it is a rocket launching site after all.