

Pollution solution from local firm

HEAVY industries emitting greenhouse gases may soon be turning to a Townsville company to soak up the carbon they produce.

VRM International has released a fertilising formulation that harnesses a collection of micro-organisms to collect carbon from the air and store it in the earth, where it improves soil quality for agriculture.

VRM founder and managing director Ken Bellamy said the product was already being embraced by the agricultural industry for its ability to build the humus content in soil, improving crop yields.

But the company believed the product would also find a market with manufacturers and metal processors as the issue of carbon sequestration gained momentum worldwide, he said.

"The exciting part of our innovation is that we can get the carbon (from the atmosphere), put it in the soil and it will stay there," Mr Bellamy said.

He believed the idea would take on very rapidly throughout Australia as a means of major industries meeting requirements for carbon reduction.

"To get to that stage is not a long step from where we are now," Mr Bellamy said.

VRM was seeking financial backing

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for intensive testing over several seasons to continue its research to quantify the amount of carbon that could be stored in different soils and crop conditions, he said.

Mr Bellamy said simple composting could not achieve the same results as the VRM product as there were limiting factors on the carbon storage achieved and that planting crops was considered to be carbon neutral as the carbon stored in the plants was released when they were harvested or processed.

"But using this method to increase the soil carbon by 1 per cent in a given area equates to hundreds of thousands of tonnes of carbon held in the soil," he said.

"So a factory that has released a few hundred thousand tonnes of carbon could – by helping farmers and paying them to use this type of product – gain a carbon credit."

Importantly, Mr Bellamy said the effects of this technique were measurable.

The company has been involved in

talks with the Federal Government and other groups involved in the formulation of a carbon trading plan for the nation's industries.

Mr Bellamy said VRM's business centred on its ability to keep groups of useful micro-organisms alive in a partially self-sustainable mix in the environments in which they were being applied.

It has turned this ability to such uses as waste management, odour control, cleaning products and bio-fertiliser.

Mr Bellamy said VRM had also achieved exciting results recently with a formulation that allowed a rapid fixation of nitrogen at high concentrations.

This gave them the ability to inoculate plain water with a small amount of product and "grow" nitrogen in the liquid for use as fertiliser. He said VRM was using the same process to "grow" carbon.

VRM is also looking at applying its microbial technology to the mining industry, where Mr Bellamy said the right mix of organisms could be used to extract ores efficiently from tailings.



*VRM managing director Ken Bellamy in the fertiliser production plant.

PHOTO: Stewart McLean

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