

Bringing the surf indoors

A Raglan company's Florida project is generating plenty of spin-off work for local manufacturers

by Georgina Bond

A Raglan firm helping create the world's first indoor computerised surf pool has won a hard-fought battle to keep the components New Zealand made.

Companies catching a ride on the back of Surf Pools' scientific expertise include tarpaulin-makers and electronics firms whose wares will be used for the \$14 million complex in Florida.

The team of 12 marine scientists, who designed and built the \$1.2 million artificial surfing reef at Mt Maunganui last year, has developed an adjustable swimming pool floor which adapts to different reef shapes.

Combined with varying water pressures, this can produce a range of wave directions up to 2.4m high.

Managing director Kerry Black said the technology could change the nature of surfing and bring it into the stadium era.

"Until now, no one has been able to create waves at indoor pools that experienced surfers would call powerful or high quality."

Black, a keen surfer, has been working on the computerised reef for about five years, testing it in a 4m by 9m scale model of the pool in a Waikato cowshed, with the help of a \$500,000 grant from Technology New Zealand.

The pool floor can be raised and lowered by computerised winches and hydraulics to create the reefs, which can be programmed to replicate classic Californian, Hawaiian, Indonesian or Australian breaks.

Surf Pools is in partnership with United States company Aquatic Development Group to seek investment in America. Construction of the pool has begun in Orlando at the Festival Bay Surf Park.

In May, Surf Pools will install its "Versa Reef" floor in the first 12m by 30m pool. A larger pool — 100m by 30m or about the size of four Olympic pools — will be then be built alongside.

Surf Pools worked hard to convince its partner to keep manufacturing in



SURFER'S PARADISE: A scale model of the Festival Bay Surf Park in Orlando, where construction is under way.

New Zealand.

"We are committed to keeping business here and it also made total sense to be in close contact with those making the various components," said Black.

"In the end, our local suppliers have added a lot of value through their ideas and suggestions."

Those who will benefit from the \$1 million in spin-off work include two

Hamilton companies covering engineering and electronics, Mt Maunganui tarpaulin-maker Unique Tarps and Covers and Auckland hydraulics firm Brevine Power Transmission.

Raglan Engineering owner Peter Williams said the opportunity to supply components for an international contract had been a first for his "typical country workshop".

It has delivered stainless steel pipe and other components that fit underneath the movable surf pool floor.

"Being just a phone call away from the designers has been central to the success of our part of the contract — they've been able to bring around a better result with all the decisions estimated at \$2 million

ations on it, sometimes a couple of times a day, to work through questions and details."

Surf Pools has also formed a joint venture with British company Surf Dome to seek investment for similar surf pool ventures there.

Black said the flow-on benefits to New Zealand businesses from this would be significant — \$1 million in work would come from the second Florida pool "and more as other international players see the technology and want a slice of the action".

The company's investment in developing the technology and producing the first full-scale Versa Reef is

SURF POOL

- Developed by 12 marine scientists.
- The floor is adjustable to different reef shapes.
- With varying water pressures, it can produce a range of wave directions and heights.
- The technology could bring surfing into the stadium era.

Black, the major shareholder in both companies, said the market for surf pools was surprisingly big, with 20 expected to be built in the US in the next few years.

While the pools would never replace traditional surfing, they were a fantastic addition.

"You can go there after work and practise on waves generated just for you and with a fixed number of people at a time so it will never be crowded like the beaches."

Surf Pools is the partner company of Artificial Surf Reefs, which specialises in designing and building artificial reefs in the ocean.

After years of researching seabeds and what makes the best waves, the team of marine scientists turned their expertise to wave pools in 1989.

Since the creation of early surfing pools in the 1960s, Black said little progress had been made.

Surf Pools has designed an artificial ocean surfing reef in Australia and is due to build one in Bourne-mouth, southern England, next year, which will be the first in Europe.

The company is also working on three reef projects in South Africa.

The rugby field-sized reef at Mt Maunganui — the company's first New Zealand artificial reef project — has stalled as the Mount Reef Trust raises more money.

Depending on when the target \$250 million is raised, the reef could be finished