

Dutch invention could create thousands of jobs in Oman

Pending trials, the design can prove to be the most effective way of maintaining an environmental balance

Richard Thomas
Muscat

An invention by a Dutch businessman has the potential to create thousands of jobs and create vast swathes of forests for industrial use on the arid earth of the sultanate.

Using a patented design, the saplings are secured against the predations of desert creatures and slowly drip fed water by a special wick that regulates the supply and captures moisture and rain when it falls. This enables the system to maximise the use of water, creating a sustainable model for fruit and wood plantations in an environmentally conscious approach, and helping to stop global desertification, said the inventor, Pieter Hoff, the CEO of Groasis AquaPro.

Speaking about the idea he presented at a recent regional water conference in Muscat, Hoff said that his invention, the Groasis Waterboxx, had a provable application where water was scarce and rainfall infre-

quent. Not only would the plantations create employment in a time of economic diversification for Oman, but they would also supply home grown food and prevent erosion.

"The Groasis Waterboxx has been selected by US based *Popular Science* magazine as one of the top ten inventions of the world in 2010. Planting trees is a business model that helps solve many environmental and social problems while making money with it," said Hoff.

"I have developed this template that shows a plan for Oman and the GCC as a whole, which consists of planting five million hectares of forests producing wood and fruits. The plan is financially very viable and can create over a million jobs in the region."

Later this year, dozens of trial runs will be taking place at locations, including some of the most parched landscapes around the world. If the trials are successful, Hoff expects that his design would prove to be the most effective way of building a busi-

ness model and maintaining an environmental balance that is presently lacking.

"In 2010, we will do around

The Groasis Waterboxx was selected by US based Popular Science magazine as one of the top 10 inventions of the world in 2010
Pieter Hoff, Inventor

25 experimental projects worldwide, with each around one and a half hectares. With the Waterboxx, humanity can plant in places where it couldn't do so before."

Working with his son who tackles the financial aspect of the business, Hoff is confident that he has unearthed a design that



will revolutionise agricultural production in arid conditions. Financial models predict a rise in prices of timber and produce associated with various plantations, as well as a quadrupling value of the new Carbon Credits market. These, according to Hoff, make the Waterboxx a viable

long term business option.

"Emission rights are going to finance planting and the first period of maintenance until the trees or bushes start to produce money. If the Gulf plants over five million hectares, it will become the first carbon neutral economy in the world."

CINEMA ROUND UP

City Cinema, Shatti Tel: 24692656 (after 2pm)

Bounty Hunter (Action) 3:30, 7:15, 9:30, 11:45pm
Al Mostabah (Arabic) 5:45, 10pm
Day Breakers (Drama) 3:30, 9:45, 11:30pm
Alice In Wonderland (Science fiction) 5:30, 7:30pm
How to Train Your Dragon (Animated) 3:30, 5:30pm
Green Zone (Drama) 7:30pm
Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans (Drama) 11:30pm

City Cinema, Sohar Tel: 26840312, 26843510

Day Breakers (Drama) 3:30, 7:30, 11:30pm
Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans (Drama) 9:30pm
Universal Soldier - Regeneration (Action) 3:30, 9:30, 11:30pm
Al Hekaya Fiha Mina (Arabic) 5:30pm
From Paris With Love (Action) 7:30pm
Happy Husbands (Mal) 3:30, 7:30, 10:30pm

Al Bahja Cinema Tel: 24540855/56

Daybreakers (Suspense) 4, 8, 10 & 11.55pm
How to train your dragon (Action) 2, 4 & 6pm
Green zone (Drama, thriller and war) 8pm & 10pm
shutter island (Action/adventure, thriller) 11.55pm
Seed (Action/adventure and comedy) 2pm
Whip it (Comedy and sports) 6pm

City Cinema, Sur Tel: 25545544

Spy Next Door (Action) 7:30, 11:30pm
Up In The Air (Comedy) 9:30pm
The Princess & The Frog (Kids) 6pm
Teen Patti (Hindi) 7:45, 10:30pm

City Cinema, Ruwi Tel: 24831809

Right Ya Wrong (Hindi) 3.30, 6.30, 9.30pm
Atithi Tum Kab Jaoge (Hindi) 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm
Na Ghar Ke Na Ghaat Ke (Hindi) 3.30, 6.30, 9.30pm

Shark conservation bid foiled in Doha



M Najmuz Zafar
Muscat

The declining shark population in Omani and Gulf waters might have received a reprieve, had the proposals tabled at the recent triennial summit of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Doha been passed.

China, Japan and Russia helped defeat a US-endorsed proposal that would have boosted conservation efforts for sharks, expressing concern that it would

hurt poor nations and saying that it should be the responsibility of regional fisheries bodies.

As reported earlier in *Muscat Daily*, out of the eight species listed for proposal in the meeting, five are commonly found in the Gulf region. The great hammerhead and scalloped hammerhead are the most commonly found sharks in Omani waters and are highly valued for their fins in the international market.

Aaron Henderson, assistant professor in the department of marine science and fisheries at

SQU, who is currently working on a project to tag sharks in Omani waters, said that defeating the proposal might seem to be a winning proposition for the fishing community, but in the long term, it is bad news for them.

"It is really sad to hear about the proceedings. However, these proposals are not only for maintaining the fish stocks, but also giving sustainability to the livelihood of fishermen. Surely, this won't be helping them in the time to come when they find there is no fish to be caught."

The non-binding measure,

which called for increased transparency in the shark trade and more research into the threat posed to sharks by illegal fishing, had been expected to gain the approval of a committee of the 175-nation CITES, but the US, the European Union and other supporters were unable to muster the two-thirds majority needed after China, Russia, Japan and several developing countries argued that shark populations are not suffering.

The decision also led to the defeat of another controversial marine proposal about banning the export of Atlantic bluefin tuna, which is popular with sushi lovers.

Henderson said that the situation is alarming in the Omani waters as he has not witnessed the presence of sharks on his forays into the sea. "It is difficult to find sharks any more, it's a big change from a few years back." He added that they return empty handed many times when they go out in search of sharks to tag them. "It is now a case of when we might get lucky and catch a shark. We often return disappointed."

Agreement to train 200 driving trainers signed

In an immediate response to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said's recent call to give extra attention to road accidents in the sultanate, Qalhat LNG inked a pact with the Traffic Safety Institute of the Royal Oman Police (ROP), to train 200 trainers in 2010.

According to a release, this is a continuation of the programme, which started last year when five groups of 100 women and male driving trainers were trained on defensive driving and safe driving techniques with an objective to transfer their adequate new knowledge to the new drivers. The agreement was signed by Major General Salim bin Musallam Qatan, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs, representing the Traffic Safety Institute, and Harib bin Abdullah al Kitani, chief executive officer, Qalhat LNG.

Kitani said, "This is one of the ambitious and innovative programmes that has been designed by the ROP to overcome traffic accidents; a serious and con-



cerning issue for the Omani community".

"This year the number has been doubled, hoping that these trainers will transfer the quality of training and knowledge they acquired at the Traffic Safety Institute to the new drivers under their training. This is how the awareness of the importance of defensive driving can be spread within the new generation of drivers. We are very optimistic

about the future outputs of this undeniably important training programme."

My thanks goes to the ROP and Traffic Safety Institute for their commitment to the success of this programme. Qalhat LNG has taken its corporate social responsibilities with great interest. This was evident by the decision to allocate one percent of our annual profits to the development of local communities."

Government to upgrade weather forecasting system

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The government of Oman has announced ambitious plans to expand and improve the capability of national meteorological data.

A range of new monitoring stations will be built throughout the country to collect accurate and up-to-date information from local areas for a comprehensive climatological map.

The present network of 32 stations that currently links with Muscat International Airport to continuously monitor climate data will be augmented, allowing for an early warning system to quickly analyse conditions and weather that could have an impact on the sultanate.

At a marine level, special computer monitors will check the wave heights along the Omani coast, giving a stream of data that could provide indicators to abnormal oceanic movements.

Further developments in numerical forecasting will include better decision making and systems to chart the course of extreme weather systems.

This project will include new meteorological radars to monitor Oman's atmosphere, where direct links with the Ministry of Information and the National Committee for Civil Defence can help disseminate and share relevant information quickly.

An agreement with the European Organisation for Satellites will give meteorologists in

Oman updated data every 15 minutes on cloud movement, aerial images and other weather conditions.

"The cooperation between the Directorate General of Meteorology and Air Navigation Civil Aviation Affairs, the Centre for Remote Sensing, GIS of Sultan Qaboos University and the World Meteorological Organisation European satellites will help make this a reality," said Badr al Romhi, Director of Forecasts and Monitoring at the Directorate General of Meteorology and Air Navigation at the Civil Aviation Affairs in the Transport and Communications Ministry.

Meanwhile, Oman joined the rest of the world in marking World Meteorological Day, on Tuesday.

AN AERIAL VIEW OF RUWI HIGH STREET



Photo: V K Shafeer