

TECHNOLOGY

Ocean sounds measuring company on verge of growth

By HARRY SULLIVAN
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GREAT VILLAGE – Cutting-edge technology designed and assembled in Great Village for measuring ocean sounds could soon be strapped to the back of a tuna or other large-body fish.

“Underwater sound is one of the most important tools for studying sea life, for working in the sea and for understanding the health of the ocean,” said Mark Wood, president of Instrument Concepts and Ocean Sonic Ltd., of Great Village, during a funding announcement on Wednesday.

“The sea is a big part of what defines Nova Scotia. This includes its history, its commerce and its future,” he said, during a visit by Cumberland-Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley MP Scott Armstrong, for the official announcement of a \$155,000 repayable ACOA loan.

The money has made it possible for Instrument Concepts to refine the design and engineering aspects of its latest ocean-measuring instrument, called the icListen Smart Hydrophone.

Instrument Concepts was incorporated in 2000 in Great Village as an engineering/consulting company for ocean measuring instruments, while Ocean Sonics was created as the manufacturing, marketing and selling arm for the state-of-the-art units.

“For those who think innovative ideas only come from big cities in Canada, Instrument Concepts and Ocean Sonics will dispel this myth,” Armstrong said.

“This is the kind of innovative enterprise we want to encourage in rural parts of Nova Scotia.”

The greatly downsized icListen unit contains enough processing power to detect acoustic activity such as the presence of whales, swimmers or boats and is designed to simplify “the collection, processing and understanding of underwater sound,” while reaching depths of 3,500 metres, Wood said.

About 80 per cent of sales so far have been to users outside of Canada in such countries as Germany, France, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Since the launch of its newest model in March, Wood said the company’s has its instruments deployed, or will soon be



Mark Wood, president of Instrument Concepts and Ocean Sonic Ltd., of Great Village, displays the company's latest cutting-edge unit for measuring ocean sounds. The screen in the background depicts the sound signature of a right whale taken in Nova Scotia waters about three weeks ago. HARRY SULLIVAN – TRURO DAILY NEWS

deployed, in the North Sea, the Bay of Biscay, the Mediterranean, Cook Inlet and “most interesting of all, the South Pole.”

The unit is also to be used on an Australian research ship and by an Italian research group at the University of Pisa for use on their autonomous underwater vehicles.

As well, the NEPTUNE Canada cabled ocean observatory in British Columbia – the largest and most advanced facility of its kind in the world – has been testing the units and now is in the process of making purchases.

In fact, Wood said, one of the units was being shipped out to NEPTUNE on Wednesday.

Dalhousie is also using some of the units in the Grand Passage as part of research for tidal turbine activity and for studying water flows

and monitoring underwater mammal activity.

Acadia University, meanwhile, is using the hydrophone to study tidal action in the Minas Passage in the Bay of Fundy as well as exploring the possibility of attaching a unit to the back of a tuna or a sturgeon to monitor where they go to forage for food.

After a pre-set time, Wood said, the hydrophone would detach itself from the fish, float to the surface and send out a signal to enable it to be retrieved.

“Feedback so far has been very positive,” Wood said.

“We expect this trend to continue and look forward to an upturn in sales over the next few weeks as contracts get signed.”

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