



MBD Energy chief R&D officer Arnold Mangott with managing director Andrew Lawson standing on a site very similar to how the new microalgae project will look.

Work nears completion on red algae plant near Alva Beach

A PRIZED red algae is set to be the next big but unlikely cash crop of the Burdekin shire.

Melbourne-based waste recycling company MBD Energy is nearing completion of what will be Australia's first astaxanthin plant near Alva Beach, growing algae as part of the remediation of water used in a nearby aquaculture farm.

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Burdekin Mayor Lyn McLaughlin said it was an exciting project providing much-needed employment and further diversifying the region's economy dominated by the sugar industry.

It was also one that nobody would have considered 10 years ago, she said.

"It's very, very exciting for the Burdekin, it's creating employment and it's providing major investment of about \$11 million to date," Cr McLaughlin said.

"You don't want to miss seeing this next project."



FILE PHOTO: Red algae photographed off the coast of Sydney.

The construction of the facility has been under way for almost a year and has involved dozens of local contractors including engineers, earthworks contractors, builders, metal fabricators, plumbers and electricians.

The facility includes 200m-long "raceways" where paddle wheels circulate water along canals in which red algae is grown and harvested.

The algae is a dietary supplement and antioxidant commanding prices of up to \$10,000 a kilo.

MBD managing director Andrew Lawson praised the "can-do" spirit of the local workforce.

He said construction was well on track with final fitout at an advanced stage and commissioning trials due to begin next month.

"When stage one of the facility is commissioned later this year we expect production capacity of up to 25 tonnes per annum with subsequent stages expected to see output quadruple to around 100 tonnes per year if required," Mr Lawson said.

"MBD has a decade-long R and D (research and development) connection with the greater Townsville region and we're delighted to be putting down strong roots here in the Burdekin that will lead to new jobs and prosperity with several million dollars in operating costs injected into the local economy each year and potential to achieve significant export earnings."

The project caps years of research and development undertaken by MBD in partnership with a team at James Cook University in Townsville undertaking algae research.

The training of 20 staff required to operate the Burdekin facility is under way.

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