

SonarData – A success story in finding fish around the world

The environment, and ecological sustainability, is becoming increasingly important as the world's natural resources are being depleted. Many fish stocks around the world are fully exploited or in decline and there is strong pressure from governments, environmental groups and the general community to manage fisheries on a sustainable basis. At the same time there is pressure from industry to maximize catches.

SonarData has quickly become world leader in the market of fisheries acoustics software. This small company is making an important contribution to the sustainable management of fish stocks in oceans and rivers, using leading edge technology and maintaining personal relationships with its customers.

The beginning

In 1995 dedicated scientists and consultants dealing in the small scientific circle of fisheries acoustics founded SonarData in Hobart, Tasmania. Early work clearly identified a need for easy to use but powerful software with an upgrade path that closely followed advances being made in the scientific world.

Sonar Data developed a piece of software, called *Echoview*®, which is used to display and analyse digital data collected from fishing boat echosounders. *EchoView*® is designed to help the scientist and fisheries manager elicit information from their acoustic data. *EchoView*® provides visualisation tools (see above picture); mathematical analysis tools to calculate fish abundance, handles huge amounts of data (Gigabytes per day) and is easy to use.

Exporting around the world

The potential for export sales was recognised early. It became apparent that research and fisheries institutions world wide were interested in a data analysis tool that could make sense of information more quickly and accurately than had previously been possible.

Breaking into the market was dependant upon building alliances with scientists in the area, to ensure continuous development of the product, and to provide a very high level of customer service. A vast majority of Sonar Data's sales are now to international markets; and almost all of its sales, deliveries, customer service and support are achieved via the Internet.

Initially, a simple export marketing plan was developed, beginning with identifying a small number of experts in the acoustics field. The company worked with them to understand their data processing needs and, by drawing on their technical expertise, further developed the product.

SonarData is now world market leader in acoustic analysis and visualisation tools for fisheries sonar and related technologies, and export sales account for over 90% of the company's income. EchoView® is used by 77 institutes world wide including the leading institutes in USA, UK, Europe, Japan and Australia.

The Future

Research and Development has always been of the highest priority to the SonarData team. The company recognises that technological advances in the visual acoustics field move quickly and that dedication to research and development is required to maintain their market advantage ahead of competitors.

SonarData is a young company – only five years old. However, it has developed or acquired the technical ability to create software products that are of a world standard and the management experience to successfully market the products to 17 countries and manage the company's rapid and yet controlled growth.

Working closely with key clients has been a successful strategy and continues today. The company has special relationships with about 6 leading institutes who test Sonar's software, provide feedback, and provide access to data, instruments and expertise. In addition, Marketing and Product Development staff spend considerable time overseas visiting clients and seeking suggestions for the next release.

SonarData's vision is first to be the leading software supplier in the world for fisheries acoustics. The company then plans to grow by extending its acoustic technology into other remote sensing applications. New export markets being explored include fisheries acoustics in river and lake environments; multibeam analysis; and for the future, niche products for remote sensing such as

- Ground penetrating radar analysis for airport runway safety inspection;
- LIDAR (light-laser) based data analysis for measuring forest biomass and tree size; and
- Seismic and bottom penetrating acoustic data analysis for mineral exploration.

The long-term future of the company is in exporting leading edge technology to high value markets around the world. At the same time Sonar Data aims at maintaining a high level of personalised customer service and the ability to listen and respond to customer's needs.

For more information: www.sonardata.com