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Weekend Business

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Barrister's bold plan to tap whirlpool energy puts the sceptics in a spin

Andrew Trounson
Alternative energy

AFTER more than a decade of getting the cold shoulder from business and sceptical academics, Melbourne inventor and barrister Paul Kouris, 53, is on the cusp of commercially demonstrating his patented dream of generating green power from water vortices.

The precise physics may be unproven — and according to some academics, it's impossible — but Mr Kouris's determination to tap energy from the "Coriolis" force generated by the spin of the earth has now been backed by a \$40,000 grant from Sustainability Victoria.

Combined with another \$40,000 from long-time friend John Poulakis, the owner of Melbourne's boutique Harrolds menswear chain, Mr Kouris is set to install a version



Energy: Paul Kouris, left, with Sustainability Victoria's John Osborne

of his Kouris Centri-Turbine generator just downstream from Steavensons Falls near picturesque Marysville in eastern Victoria.

"It is basically a water wheel on

its end, like an egg beater, and put into a vortex. It isn't rocket science," Mr Kouris told *The Australian*. It may not be rocket science, but the premise is controversial.

Traditional physical theory suggests that the fall of a body of water can produce only a fixed amount of energy, and the key to maximising that energy is to have a turbine operating as efficiently as possible. But Mr Kouris asserts that by adding a vortex — the whirlpool we see running down our plugholes — his turbine can increase energy generation by 5-25 per cent.

But it has been an uphill battle convincing academia or government to listen, and Mr Kouris believes his background in law instead of engineering played against him. In a breakthrough last year, the University of Ballarat carried out some lab testing and confirmed the theoretical "minimal energy" contribution of a vortex.

But whether this is the result of tapping a new energy source or simply harnessing the latent

gravity-fed energy of water more efficiently is a subject of debate.

But the university's testing was the key in winning government funding, and Mr Kouris's invention this month featured in the Australian section of the Solar Wind and Earth Energy trade fair in Korea.

Also key was bitter-sweet news in 2006 that a small-scale project in Austria is successfully generating electricity by setting up several vortices in concrete ponds on the banks of a river. While a patent dispute is now brewing with the Austrians, Mr Kouris believes it is vindication of his ideas, which date back to when he was a student during the 1970s energy crisis.

"There is no point in telling me it doesn't work when it is powering 14 houses in Austria," Mr Kouris said.

While traditional physicists say that Mr Kouris's ideas are tanta-

mount to trying to create something out of nothing, if he can commercialise his invention and scale it up, it holds out the prospect of extracting significant power efficiencies from exploiting river and irrigations systems and even artesian bores.

Rohan Cranney, a farmer on the Murray River at Corowa on the NSW-Victoria border, is so keen on the invention that he is in negotiations with Mr Kouris to buy into it.

Mr Cranney is hoping to have a version of the KCT installed in a creek on this farm by September and believes he could eventually have six in his creek.

Mr Kouris is planning to have the Marysville project in operation by the end of June. It is expected to produce about 30kW from the water flow, or enough electricity to power 20-30 houses.

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