



Supershock founder Oscar Fiorinotto (r) and Rheinmetall Global Head of Vehicle systems, Ben Hudson. Photo Dean Martin

Early support for SA tech start-ups unlocks successes

Valerina Changarathil, The Advertiser

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MORE than \$40 million has been invested in 36 early-stage technology businesses in South Australia in the past three years — half of which came from Australian taxpayers.

The Federal Government's Accelerating Commercialisation program, started in April 2015, to help businesses with access to expert advice and matched funding of up to \$1 million to take novel products, processes and services to market.

In April this year, the national program hit its first significant investment milestone of \$20 million in SA, which has been matched by the companies.

Nationally, more than 200 companies have participated in this program.

South Australian success story Supashock is one of the beneficiaries, receiving \$468,887 in April 2017.

Supashock designs, develops and manufactures active shock absorbers for motorsport and heavy mining applications to help improve safety, ride quality and loading operations.

German defence and automotive giant Rheinmetall bought a 49 per cent stake in the company in July last year, catapulting the \$2 million to \$3 million turnover business with 30 staff into a \$100 million global business.

Supashock chief operating officer Les Shearn told *The Advertiser* the commercialisation grant

assisted the company to developing its semi active suspension technology, initially developed for use in the resources sector, into a fully active system for use on vehicles operating in the defence sector.

"The development of the system has also led to international opportunities within the defence and commercial sectors.

"Supashock is currently involved in defence programs within South East Asia, Europe and an autonomous vehicle manufacturer in the US that have all been secured based on capabilities enhanced through the AC Grant," Mr Shearn said.

"These opportunities have resulted in Supashock growing its workforce and moving to new facilities at Edinburgh Parks in the north of Adelaide."

Another standout technology company mapping a global pathway to success is Makers Empire, which received around \$685,000 from the Accelerating Commercialisation program between 2015 and 2017, which was matched by the founders and other investors.

The Adelaide 3D software company attracted a key equity deal with a new US-based shareholder in November last year.



Maker's Empire co-founder Jon Soong with some of the students trying out Maker's Empire 3D software. Pic Supplied.

US cloud services company Polar3D's has made Makers Empire a partner in its GE's Additive Education program to roll out 3D printers (and related education) to 400 schools there.

Makers' software, which helps children from kindergarten through to Year 8 get familiar with 3D printing and also assists teachers in education, will be rolled out to 200 of those schools.

Makers Empire chief executive and co-founder Jon Soong said his team of 20 people has developed a complete learning program for schools that also includes lesson plans, resources, professional development and training for teachers.

“The commercialisation funding was used to help us complete development of our product, launch it in China and the US and raise money from local and overseas investors.”

“Without the support of the Accelerating Commercialisation grant, our progress would have taken much longer and/or may not have been possible,” Mr Soong said.

Accelerating Commercialisation director Larry Lopez said the program had been an important part of the SA innovation ecosystem.

“As the largest single funder of early stage technology in SA over the last three years, we are so pleased and proud to be an integral part of the SA innovation ecosystem and playing such a meaningful and influential role.

“(And) the \$20 million funding is one part of the support ... the other is our (team of) commercialisation advisers who are based in SA,” Mr Lopez said.

South Australia has a relatively higher proportion of deals than other states principally due to the efforts of advisers on the ground in SA, he said.

“We’re enthused by these companies which have the potential to rapidly increase their revenue, capital and employment numbers by deploying their novel technology as a driver for success,” Mr Lopez said. He highlighted SA companies Sine, Supashock and Seed Terminator that were all growing rapidly as a result of the support provided by the program.

“Sine’s visitor management system is making great inroads internationally with staff in the UK and the US as well as a rapidly growing team in Adelaide, (while) Seed Terminator’s machines are rolling off the production line and Supashock’s suspension technology is arousing very strong interest in the defence sector,” he said.