

The New Black Biochar

Image by The New Black Biochar

Overview

The New Black biochar production company was co-founded by Christina Giudici and Bodie Cavanagh and grew from an idea to produce biochar from sawmill waste and use the heat generated for drying green timber. Bodie built a continuous flow pyrolysis plant, which can process large quantities of feedstock into biochar under highly controlled conditions.

Christina and Bodie formed a working group with Sam Whitehead of the Good Car Co., to work on a scale-up plan for operations.

Objective

The goal is to produce high-quality biochar in bulk, catering to diverse niche applications such as reducing emissions from timber fines and forestry residues, supporting regenerative agriculture, soil remediation strategies and developing innovative products for removing pollutants from waterways.

The vision is to generate a tangible impact on climate change by sequestering tonnes of carbon and “catalyse a cascade of carbon capture” in regenerative systems.



Christina Giudici

Co-founder, The New Black Biochar

“We’re driven by the tangible impact of sequestering tonnes of carbon and catalysing a cascade of carbon capture.”

“We have a solution that can significantly reduce carbon emissions but how do we scale up our operations?”

The group undertook a full-day strategic planning session, which was critical for ‘stepping out’ of the business to define and align the individual objectives of the founders and other stakeholders in the business. Their first step was to identify and analyse the drivers and barriers to growth they were experiencing. With these clearly defined, they could develop a range of strategies and establish an agreed plan of action. Follow up meetings with an objective third party helped to create a sense of accountability and provide ‘fresh eyes’ on the issue.



Identify drivers and barriers

A shared vision inspired the group to persevere and clearly defining the barriers to growth generated new ideas in response.



Define potential pathways

The group stepped through potential pathways to growth and evaluated their capacity to respond to various scenarios.



Set achievable goals

The group set a goal to raise funds for an automatic feeder to increase throughput on the plant as a medium-term growth strategy.



Lessons Learnt

New businesses in emerging industries face additional barriers to growth, including limited access to funding due to the perceived risks of the ‘unknown’. This highlights the critical intersection of funding availability and operational scalability for small businesses in the emerging circular economy.

Startups providing innovative technical solutions for emissions reduction are disadvantaged compared to digital startups, which can scale rapidly with minimal human resources or physical infrastructure, and lower regulatory hurdles. Investors in digital startups have a higher risk appetite because of the demonstrated potential for high returns.

Startups in the Circular Economy in Tasmania must be highly strategic, developing key partnerships, and an ability to pivot to access grant programs and build niche value propositions for emerging customer segments.

Learning into action

What have you learnt from Christina’s experience that you could put into action in your business? Here are three actions you could take right now:

- Brainstorm or investigate the key issues your industry is facing in the transition to a low-emissions economy.
- Ask yourself, what capabilities do I have that could be applied to developing solutions?
- Find out if any there are any small businesses working on solutions and become an early adopter or offer to collaborate on trials.

Outcomes

A range of strategies for the growth of the business have been explored and documented.

The founders reached an agreement in principle on the business structure and their individual roles.

An application for a State Government grant has been prepared and submitted, to fund an automatic feeder for the plant.