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# Heated wetsuits a hot item on the winter surfing scene

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Alison Aprhys

May 4, 2007

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THE battle for the surfing dollar is heating up with wetsuit manufacturers releasing hot options for colder waters.

Surfing through the Victorian winter takes commitment. While there are stronger swells and smaller crowds, bitter southerly winds penetrate the thickest wetsuit.

Those braving the icy waters can now strap on the Hotsuit, a heat-pack kidney belt. "The Hotsuit is worn under your wetsuit and uses a chemical reaction to release the heat," creator Chris Lyons says, and can keep a surfer warmer for about an hour.

A 2005 segment winner on the ABC's *New Inventors*, it has sold more than 10,000 units since its release last year.

Some 90 per cent of Hotsuits are exported to the US, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Portugal, Scandinavia, Korea and the Netherlands.

Mr Lyons has now designed an upgraded version that incorporates a slim battery. It is to be released to the market later this year.

Rob Bain, wetsuit category manager for O'Neill, estimates that the Australian wetsuit market is worth about \$25 million a year.

Ripcurl recently announced the release of its colder-climate wetsuit, the H-Bomb.

"The market in cold water regions such as Ireland, Canada and Scotland was telling us that surfers could not get out when the water was one or two degrees Celsius," says Peter Coles, Ripcurl's global sourcing manager.

He says the H-Bomb is the first power-heated wetsuit, using two fibre-heating elements that keep the wearer warm. It will initially have a limited release.

"It's a really good marketing call but won't have much effect on the wetsuit market here," Mr Bain predicts.

Michael Di Sciascio, the director of Strapper Surfboards who sells thousands of wetsuits a year from his Torquay shop, says, "We already have customer interest in the Hotsuits".

He estimates that the Hotsuit will do well compared with the higher-priced H-Bomb.

<http://www.hotsuits.com.au>

<http://www.ripcurl.com/hbomb>

<http://www.oneill.com>

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