

New appointment puts chip designer on the crest of a wave

GORDON SMITH

SEMICONDUCTOR company DecaWave has appointed Jim O'Hara, the former head of Intel in Ireland, as chairman and raised additional funding of €6 million.

The current funding round was mostly sourced from existing private investors, including a group called the Austin Syndicate, based in Texas. Other individuals in Ireland and France have backed the company, and Enterprise Ireland has also invested in DecaWave.

It brings total investment in DecaWave to €12.4 million so far, and the company is planning a further €12 million funding round for later this year. The 25-strong company also plans to hire more staff later this year.

DecaWave is a fabless semiconductor company that designs its own silicon chips that are then manufactured by outsourced third parties. It specialises in ultra wideband technology for real-time location systems and wireless sensor networks.

Its ScenSor chip can precisely locate thousands of tagged assets within a narrow radius. The company has two patents issued in the US and 14 more applications filed.

"The real crown jewels of DecaWave's intellectual property is the



IPO plans: (from left) Ciaran Connell, chief executive, and Jim O'Hara, chairman, with DecaWave's new CTO Michael McLaughlin

ability to do precision location in a very small chip," says Ciaran Connell, DecaWave's chief executive.

It's also claimed the chip runs on very low power and, when manufactured in volume, will cost less than competing technologies.

DecaWave was founded in 2004, making it one of Ireland's more mature tech start-ups. The nature of the industry meant co-founder and chief technology officer Michael McLaughlin spent several years on standards committees to develop the IEEE 802.15.4a Ultra-Wideband (UWB) radio standard.

That process enhanced the com-

pany's technical reputation and ensured it would be at the forefront of an emerging market, says Connell.

DecaWave has letters of endorsement from 10 customers to buy its ScenSor chip in bulk once it has been manufactured.

Connell says the chip has applications in a variety of sectors including manufacturing, healthcare, lighting, security, transport, inventory and supply chain management. The company now aims to narrow its focus on key customers in specific vertical markets.

The appointment of O'Hara is

intended to speed this stage along. He led the technology and manufacturing group at Intel, one of the largest multinational employers in the State, for 20 years.

He is a board member of Enterprise Ireland, as well as other public companies, and is involved in some technology start-ups.

O'Hara says he anticipates spending at least one day per week with DecaWave as it prepares to put its chip into mass production. He sees his role as helping the company with management processes and business development plans ahead of planned growth.

"Since retiring a year and a half ago from Intel, I wanted to get involved with a start-up and I was familiar with DecaWave.

"It was a natural fit - I was available and DecaWave was looking for someone. They've got a part that really does work and customer interest that's pretty broad," he says.

Connell says the company ultimately aims to go public, and O'Hara lists this as another reason for becoming involved. "I have a personal aspiration to get Irish companies to an IPO situation. Most [indigenous] companies end in trade sales, and hardly any get to IPO."