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Aart Ligterink, Seaway



SHL newbuild Oleg Strashnov at work on the Sheringham Shoal wind farm project.

The winds of change

Seaway Heavy Lifting (SHL) is anticipating a relatively quiet year or two for its vessels in the North Sea but, if the events of recent months are anything to go by, work from unexpected sources could yet turn that forecast on its head. **David Morgan** reports.

Zoetermeer-based SHL took delivery of its new state-of-the-art, DNV1A1-classed crane vessel this spring and, with its 3500m² of deck space and 5000t revolving crane lift capacity, had clearly hoped to put the DP3 *Oleg Strashnov* through its paces on the kind of jacket, heavy deck or deepwater template installation work that is beyond the 2500t scope of sister vessel *Stanislav Yudin*.

Instead, the newbuild's first offshore assignment came by default from the wind energy sector. Statoil – equal partner with Statkraft in Scira Offshore, owner of the Sheringham Shoal offshore wind farm development – asked SHL to take over this UK North Sea project's late-running foundation work after the original contractor ran into difficulties. The requirement was for SHL to install 68 of the foundation piles for Sheringham Shoal's 88 wind turbines, along with 71

transition pieces. As *OE* went to press, *Oleg Strashnov* was making good progress and looked set to finish the job by the end of August, at which point the vessel will mobilise for its first oil industry assignment: installing the Clipper South deck for RWE early September.

SHL marketing and business development manager Aart Ligterink says *Oleg Strashnov's* wind sector debut has been 'good for the vessel and good for the crew'. He adds a note of caution, however, both for utility companies planning offshore wind farms and for the less proactive North Sea oil & gas companies.

He warns the utilities against rushing into offshore projects with limited experience or backup. 'There are a lot of vessels being marketed for the wind farm sector that were really built for nearshore activity and tend to run into problems when they go further offshore – there's a

big difference,' he points out. And to North Sea operators apparently unaware of, or unconcerned by the potential threat to vessel availability posed by the anticipated upsurge in European offshore wind farm construction, he says: 'Hey guys, it's time to wake up!'

'The UK government alone wants 20GW installed by 2020, starting in 2014 – that's around 5000 wind turbines in five years,' Ligterink explains. 'There's no way that can be done, of course, but even assuming 500 per year and an average installation time of two days including waiting on weather, you are still talking about a huge amount of vessel time.'

While acknowledging the many uncertainties surrounding the wind energy sector and its forward projections, he nonetheless believes utility companies may before long be considering hiring available offshore barges for anything up to five years, effectively taking them out of the market just as oil & gas operators are adding 'a huge pile of decommissioning work' to their traditional North Sea installation requirements.

'Our message to the operators is simply: "Be aware of what's happening",' adds Ligterink. 'They need to communicate with the industry at an early stage rather than just leaning back, relaxed, and expecting that the vessels will be there and prices may even have gone down when they are in the market for a decommissioning or installation job in three or four years' time. That's just not going to happen. But if we contractors know what's coming up, we can help with scheduling and plan our resources accordingly.'

In July, *Stanislav Yudin* completed the removal of the six platforms of the Shell Indefatigable complex in the southern North Sea, giving SHL further valuable experience in a business segment Ligterink envisages taking off in a big way from 2013 onwards.

Indeed, except for the occasional spring or fall excursion that fits with SHL schedules – for example, for remote jobs able to capitalise on *Oleg Strashnov's* 14 knots transit speed, or Russian arctic heavy lift work requiring the vessel's optimal workability on full DP3 – he envisages both of the company's vessels