PACIFIC TOWING

‘Pacific Towing – Delivering More than Harbour Towage’

Melanesian marine services company, Pacific Towing (PacTow), assists an average of 3,500 vessels annually in five ports in Papua New Guinea, as well as in Honiara, Solomon Islands. Although harbour towage is PacTow’s core business, the company provides a raft of additional services to the shipping industry. PacTow also plays an important role in the region’s maritime safety, environmental protection, and more recently port upgrades.

PacTow’s 20-vessel fleet is deployed throughout PNG including at its busiest ports of Lae (pictured) and Port Moresby, as well as in Honiara, Solomon Islands. It has ‘blue water’ tugs available for international salvage and towage projects.

PacTow’s harbour towage services are central to the safe entry and departure of a diverse array of domestic and international ships that call into PNG’s main ports, as well as into Honiara. As such, the company is an integral pillar of the maritime industry, providing essential services and facilitating regional as well as international trade. It’s not just cargo vessels, bulk carriers, and RORO vessels relying on PacTow’s harbour towage services but also naval ships, cruise liners, and sometimes even fuel and LNG tankers.

With its own 20-vessel fleet, PacTow has its tugs (Azimuth Stern Drive and Conventional) permanently deployed at the various ports it operates from, including at PNG’s busiest ports of Lae and Port Moresby. The majority of its 200+ staff (97 percent nationalised), as well as its in-house engineering and workshop departments are located at its Port Moresby headquarters and dedicated tug base.

“People not familiar with the shipping industry or tugboat operations often think that helping ships berth and unberth is all that a company like PacTow does” says General Manager, Neil Papenfus. “However, tugs have a vast range of capabilities and PacTow’s service offerings have greatly diversified over its 46-year history.”

Not only has PacTow’s towage service portfolio expanded – their ‘blue water’ capabilities have seen their tugs transporting ships and barges as far afield as Guam, Micronesia, Indonesia, and Australia (QLD, NT, WA) – but they have introduced additional non-towage services (e.g., liferaft sales and servicing, commercial diving, salvage, emergency response, and a range of specialised offerings for oil and gas clients).

PacTow’s salvage and oil spill services (i.e., both mitigation and clean-up) are increasingly in demand. “There is more vessel traffic in the region than ever before, and PNG has a rapidly expanding oil and gas industry” explains Papenfus. The company has participated in more than 70 salvages in the last 20 years, with a growing number of these outside Melanesia, and regularly assists with oil spills. Thus, the company plays a significant role in safeguarding not only vessels and crews but the marine environment and therefore the livelihood and cultural practices of thousands of coastal communities.

PacTow also provides spill prevention services to bunkering vessels and tankers transferring fuel and it works in partnership with energy clients on spill training drills. “Our collaboration with clients as well as with Port and Safety Authorities allow us to capacity build emergency and spill capabilities within our own organisation, as well as at an industry level, and even nationally. An example of this is PacTow’s involvement in the development of PNG’s ‘National Oil Spill Response Plan’.

Another role PacTow is playing that facilitates the region’s shipping industry, as well as PNG’s development, is its involvement in the upgrade of two of PNG’s ports. The port upgrades are part of a broader infrastructure program funded by multiple parties including the PNG and Australian governments. PacTow’s commercial dive team – the region’s only permanent commercial dive operation – has been contracted to perform a range of tasks for the upgrades including seabed surveys, debris clearance, and underwater cutting.

PacTow’s varied service offerings are evidence that the company is much more than ‘just a harbour towage provider’. Marine Operations Manager, Gerard Kasnari, explains that it’s not just the services PacTow provides that has contributed to its market leadership status but also the way it does business, including its social license credentials. “We employ local, we provide exceptional training both in-country and overseas, we have invested in two cadetship programs to grow the next generation of Melanesian seafaring professionals, and we’re committed to the development and prosperity of the communities in which we operate. An example of this commitment is our ongoing presence in some of PNG’s smaller and less profitable ports – without PacTow the people in those communities would miss out on vital shipping services.”

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PacTow is part of a larger sea and land logistics group wholly owned by Steamships Limited.
To learn more about PacTow:
www.pacifictowingmarineservices.com