Women in Maritime programme enhances PNG towage

Papua New Guinea's newest officers of the watch at their December graduation ceremony (source: PacTow)

Pacific Towing's (PacTow) Women in Maritime programme continues to produce new officers for Papua New Guinea's (PNG) maritime sector. The programme is not only helping remedy the problem of a workforce shortfall in the developing nation, but also reduces gender inequality in the maritime sector as it fast-tracks the seafaring aspirations of young women.

The Women in Maritime programme, a partnership between PacTow, the Australian Government, Consort Express Lines and Swire Shipping, was launched in 2018. To date, 40 women have been awarded a scholarship as either a deck or engine cadet and 18 have graduated to pursue careers with PNG shipping companies.

PacTow general manager Neil Papenfus says cadets receive both theoretical and practical training during their three-year programme. The theoretical component is undertaken in-country whereas training at sea occurs both in PNG's waters and internationally.

Cadets experience their PNG sea time on PacTow's tug fleet which provides services in PNG and the broader region, and on the vessels of sister company Consort Express Lines.

Swire Shipping provides cadets with valuable international sea time on much larger, more sophisticated and technologically advanced vessels. Thus far, PacTow cadets have visited ports in Singapore, Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand and Thailand on Swire Shipping vessels.

Mr Papenfus says the need for PNG to train a new generation of seafaring professionals has never been more crucial. "Not only does our maritime sector currently have an estimated 30% shortfall of high-ranking officers – that is, officers of the watch and above – we are also on the brink of a surge in demand for maritime services which will potentially see this shortfall increase to greater than 50%."

PNG is about to experience a 10-year LNG construction phase boom associated with two consecutive LNG projects. "The primary means of transport for the construction boom will be via sea and river, necessitating more vessels, and therefore more seafarers," explains Mr Papenfus.

"PNG simply does not have enough seafarers qualified to crew all of the vessels required and unfortunately this means shippers will have to recruit internationally which in turn, means Papua New Guineans will miss out on significant employment opportunities."

An obvious solution to the shortage of PNG seafaring professionals is for shipping companies to introduce or expand their cadetship programmes. Mr

An innovative women's cadetship programme has boosted the maritime workforce in Papua New Guinea

"GENDER SMART SAFETY LOOKS AT WORKPLACE SAFETY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN"

Papenfus says these programmes should not only target men but women too.

He acknowledges some challenges to recruiting female cadets, including safety perceptions. "Female seafarers the world over experience specific safety concerns when working at sea with predominantly male crews, one of the most serious being the risk of sexual violence. As with any other risk though, this can be mitigated," says Mr Papenfus.

In 2020, PacTow introduced Gender Smart Safety, a programme specifically designed to maximise the workplace safety of its female employees both at sea and on shore.

"Gender Smart Safety looks at workplace safety from the perspective of women and it involves women in every aspect of safety management, giving them decision making power over how to mitigate risk – including the risk of sexual violence – and therefore make their workplaces safer," explains Mr Papenfus.

In addition to Gender Smart Safety, PacTow has implemented a range of other initiatives to improve the safety of its female workforce and to position the company as an employer of choice for PNG women.

Such initiatives include programmes to support women impacted by family and sexual violence, which include access to emergency accommodation, case management, and counselling, sexual harassment training, and leadership development training.

Mr Papenfus says part of the reason PacTow's Women in Maritime cadetship programme has been successful in producing new officers of the watch for PNG's maritime sector is because of the gender equality initiatives it has in place.

"PNG needs more seafarers, and this includes female seafarers. We would struggle as a sector if we do not tap into the vast pool of talent PNG women represent." PacTow is owned by logistics group Steamships Ltd.

"A well-maintained fleet and a dedicated and exceptionally trained team underpin the company's ongoing expansion and success," says Mr Papenfus. "It helps us deliver excellent, reliable and safe marine services through PNG and the broader region, and strengthens PNG's maritime sector which is important to PNG's development" ■

Steamships bolsters fleet for LNG newbuild project

Steamships has invested more than US$21M in tugs and barges to support LNG projects in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Its logistics division has acquired three tug and barge sets and transferred them to the PNG flag to expand the availability of locally owned marine assets to energy companies and subcontractors building LNG facilities and terminals.

Steamships has positioned itself as a preferred partner of choice for logistics solutions within PNG, including for the resources sector.

It has purchased tugboats 2013-built, 27-m *Yelia*; 2014-built, 26-m *Aird Hills*; 2011-built, 26-m *Lolo* and barges *CEL 501*, *CEL 502* and *CEL* 202 from southeast Asian owners.

These were mobilised from southeast Asia and Australia to PNG according to automatic identification system data, with *Yelia*, *Aird Hills*, *CEL 501* and *CEL 502* operating for TotalEnergies and other resource companies from November 2023. *Lolo* and *CEL 202* arrived by the end of December 2023 to go on charter.

All tugs are equipped with cranes to support the operating capacity of the barges and ensure maximum trading versatility. These shallow-draught tugs have conventional twin-screw propellors and bow thrusters. Each barge is equipped with a powerful bow ramp which enables the easy roll-on/roll-off loading of various cargoes.

"Steamships' investment in modernising and expanding its tug and barge fleet supports our vision to be the partner of choice for the Papua LNG project which we believe will help drive the country's economic development well into the future," says Steamships chief operating officer Chris Daniells.

Yelia and *CEL 502* started operations for TotalEnergies in November 2023, and by 10 December had completed two voyages up the Purari River, transporting 1,500-2,000 tonnes of aggregates from Port Moresby to Herd Base on each sailing.

Aird Hills was operating on the Purari River and is supporting berthing of all project barges, while providing stand-by for safety and assisting with downstream transits.

"Conditions on the river continue to be challenging due to strong currents during heavy rainfall and shallow water during dry periods," says Steamships Logistics general manager for projects Daymon Pnematicatos. "All stakeholders are working well together to ensure operations run smoothly and more importantly, safely."

Steamships has focused on ensuring the benefits of the Papua LNG project are felt throughout the nation. In December 2023, it formed Hebamo Transport with Laba Holdings to provide logistical support to the resource industry. This combines Laba's local presence at the PNG LNG site with Steamships EastWest Transport's experience in land logistics services for the energy and mining sectors.

In June 2023, Steamships formed the Gulf Maritime Services joint venture with GFS and the Gulf Provincial Government to hire and train maritime cadets from PNG.

Yelia tug and *CEL 502* barge in Fairfax Harbour in PNG will support LNG construction projects (source: Steamships)