PNG 50th Anniversary Commemoration

From One Tugboat to a Regional Market Leader: Pacific Towing's Growth Journey's Alongside PNG's Development'

As Papua New Guinea celebrates 50 years of independence this September, one of its homegrown contributors to national development also marks nearly five decades of growth, resilience, and service – marine services company, Pacific Towing (PacTow).

Founded in 1977 in the country's industrial heart of Lae, PacTow started with a single tug – the 'Jas Hill'. Like the newly independent PNG, PacTow was small, ambitious, and full of potential. Today, it stands as Melanesia's leading marine services provider, boasting a fleet of 20 vessels, operations at five of PNG's major ports, as well as another in Solomon Islands, and a workforce of over 250 people.

The evolution of PacTow in many ways reflects PNG's national journey. Both began with modest resources, facing the challenge of navigating a complex and diverse landscape – be it geographical or economic. Yet both have grown through partnerships, perseverance, and a commitment to local capacity-building.

Navigating Change and Building Capability

PNG's post-independence years have been marked by rapid change – an expanding economy, increasing global engagement, and the ongoing challenge of building infrastructure across hundreds of islands and rugged terrain. Alongside, PacTow evolved from a simple harbour towage provider into a full-service marine operation supporting industries vital to PNG's growth (e.g., mining, oil, gas, shipping, agriculture) and trade.

Over the decades, strategic joint ventures infused the company with technical expertise and financial strength, enabling it to acquire new vessels and expand operations into the key PNG ports of Port Moresby, Rabaul, Madang, and Kimbe. By the early 2000s, the company was also servicing resource hubs such as Lihir Island on a project and charter basis. In 2014, JV partner Steamships transitioned to full ownership.

A Partner in PNG's Maritime and Economic Development

As PNG's economy diversified, PacTow played a crucial role in ensuring the movement of goods and services between ports and international markets. Its tugboats and support vessels helped expand maritime trade routes, service offshore projects, and assist thousands of ships entering and exiting PNG waters each year.

Notably, the company has become integral to the country's resource sector. In addition to its core harbour towage services, PacTow's emergency response, pollution prevention, and commercial diving services in particular, support the safe export of PNG's mineral and energy wealth. And with LNG operations poised to ramp up across the country, PacTow is poised to deepen its service to the sector.

Beyond the resource sector, PacTow plays an equally vital role in facilitating PNG's broader trade economy. Given that the vast majority of PNG's imports and exports are transported by sea, PacTow's harbour towage services are essential to ensuring that vessels can safely berth and unberth at ports across the country. This includes assisting ships carrying significant agricultural commodities such as coffee, cocoa, copra, and palm oil.

PacTow's contribution to the agriculture sector spans both international and domestic logistics – the company supports international shipping lines that export these goods to global markets, as well as local coastal shippers that move agricultural products from rural communities to major urban ports. In doing so, PacTow helps to link PNG's farmers and agribusinesses to supply chains that extend from remote villages to cities around the world.

Investing in People & Training

At the heart of PacTow's growth is its people – ninety-seven percent of whom are Papua New Guinean. The company has long prioritised local employment, training, and professional development. Many of its seafarers and commercial divers have international experience and certifications.

As PNG strives to build an increasingly skilled workforce, PacTow has emerged as a pioneer. In 2018, in partnership with Swire Shipping and the Australian Government, it launched the 'Women in Maritime Scholarship Program' in addition to its own in-house programme. To date, 48 women have received scholarships, with more than half now graduated and contributing to the maritime industry.

PacTow's commitment to skills development and gender equality reflects a broader national goal – to create opportunities for all Papua New Guineans, regardless of gender or geography, to contribute to and benefit from economic growth.

Safety, Stewardship, and International Reach

PacTow has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to safety and environmental protection. Whether responding to maritime accidents, environmental incidents, or complex logistical challenges in remote coastal areas, the company's 24/7 emergency response and salvage teams, as well as its pollution prevention services have played a crucial role in safeguarding lives, vessels, cargo, and marine ecosystems. Its liferaft sales and servicing business further reinforces this safety stewardship as do its plans to introduce its own firefighting service.

Though proudly based in PNG, PacTow's influence extends well beyond national waters. Since expanding into the Solomon Islands in 2013, it has become a respected marine services provider much further afield, having embarked on various salvage and ocean towage projects in not just Melanesia but also Micronesia, Indonesia, Singapore and Northern Australia.

Backed by ISO certifications in quality, environmental management, and occupational health and safety, PacTow blends international standards with deep-rooted national values. Its operations prove that PNG-owned businesses can succeed internationally while remaining true to local priorities and a shared commitment to safe, responsible service.

A Promising Future

As PNG turns 50, PacTow also prepares for a new chapter. Plans for further geographical expansion and additional service offerings signal a confident future. Just as PNG seeks to diversify its economy and deepen international partnerships, PacTow aims to leverage its expertise, fleet, and workforce to continue driving development across the region.

Both stories – nation and company – share a foundation of determination, adaptability, and service. From humble beginnings in the late 1970s to present-day success, PacTow and PNG have grown together.

To learn more about PacTow:
www.pacifictowingmarineservices.com.

PacTow's well maintained and versatile fleet of 20 vessels are strategically located throughout PNG as well as at its Solomon Islands' operation.

PacTow is Melanesia's only full member of the International Salvage Union (ISU) and International Spill Control Organization (ISCO) – saving lives, protecting assets, and safeguarding the environment.

PacTow's harbour towage and pollution prevention services provide critical support to PNG's resource sector, and the company has introduced a raft of specialised services – delivered by its commercial diving team – for its oil and gas clients.

PacTow has invested heavily in growing PNG's next generation of seafaring professionals via its two cadetship programmes, one of which – the Women in Maritime programme – is a partnership with the Australian Government, Consort Express Lines and Swire Shipping.

A proud PNG company, PacTow has a highly qualified and experienced 250+ workforce, 97 percent of whom are Papua New Guinean.