

Co-Ordination, Co-Operation and communication is key

We have often highlighted the importance of Operations & Maintenance within the industry. As in all industries co-ordination, co-operation and communications are key to reliable and successful outcomes.

CO-ORDINATION HUB

Our sponsor Green Marine Solutions explains advanced marine co-ordination in some detail with the purpose of stimulating a wider debate on the concept of a regional, national and European marine co-ordination hub.

The offshore wind industry's increasing complexity means that advanced marine co-ordination (MC) is now both a necessity and a cost. If the adage is true that necessity leads to invention, you might be looking for options that take MC from the hands of traditional seafarer marine co-ordinators, who depend on a radio, computer link, experience and memory and into the instant real-time digital age.



In consequence, operators could soon be logging in for immediate co-ordination solutions in much the same way that they already refer routinely to the Met Office for detailed local weather forecasts.

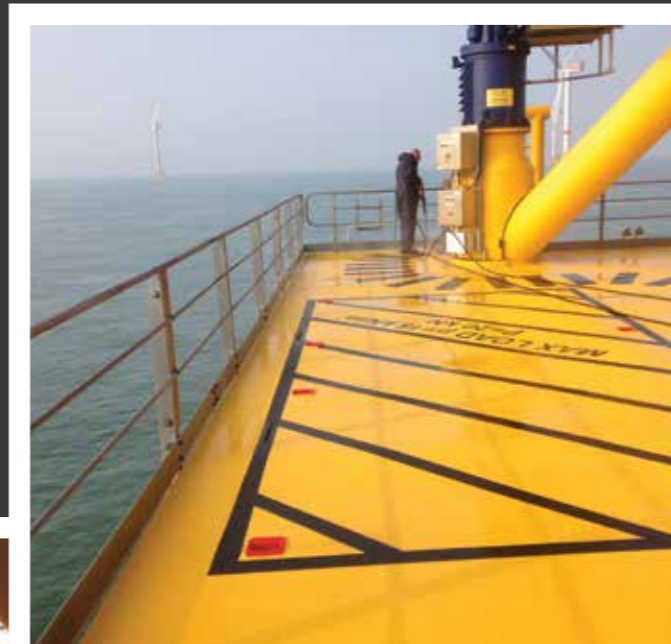
LOCATION IS NO PROBLEM

The advantage of MCCs in general, but large central hubs in particular, is that they can handle and interpret high volumes of data which can be pooled profitably.

Clearly, centralised MCCs must accommodate a wide range of different systems and emergency response procedures reliably and flexibly.

However, with digital systems location is not a primary concern. Wherever based, costs and skills can be shared. The resource pool is larger. Options increase. Efficient decisions can be made quickly. Everyone wins.

Information in general is being centralised. The Met Office is a hub for accurate weather information. Similarly the Highways Agency co-ordinates complex logistical projects. The offshore energy industry is an obvious candidate for further modernisation.



Firstly asset management becomes much more efficient. Secondly and very importantly, management functions and physical operations can be separated. This paves the way for new super-MC hubs.

GERMAN PROJECT IN SAXONY

In Germany, GMS is working closely with Offshore Marine Management (OMM) on its strategy for a new MCC facility at Cuxhaven near the mouth of the Elbe River.

The result is likely to be a digital hub that combines GMS with major OMM infrastructure developments on a 12,000 m3 prime site offering direct water access, including a ro-ro ramp. This combination would link two cost-saving concepts.

The first is for 2nd and 3rd tier service companies to work together on critical offshore wind farm Inspection Maintenance and Repair (IMR) in a way that companies alone cannot achieve.

OMM would provide flexible space for goods handling, vessel requirements - including harbour master interface - customs and security needs.

Crucially, the second would be to operate a single MCC for all companies involved, explains OMM's CEO, Rob Grimmond: "Our aim is setting higher safety standards as a new base level for every company involved," he says. "We would expect GMS to play an advanced role here."

And adds, "The new onsite MCC is designed to control all vessel and personnel movements associated with partner companies. It will also co-ordinate other key tasks, such as a single point for people, equipment and vessel safety and competency verifications."

WIND INDUSTRY STEP-CHANGE

"Working with GMS, we think this progressive approach is unique and a step-change for the offshore wind industry," he notes.

"It will provide an additional MCC prior to the wind farm MCC which we are confident will raise minimum HSE standards. Ultimately, we want to remove this duplication and deliver additional cost efficiencies beyond the immediate HSE improvements. We think GMS's approach will help us." Rob concluded.

SUB-CONTRACTOR VIEW

Would offshore sub-contracting firms use a central MCC on a project-by-project in much the same way that they routinely refer to the Met office for weather?

GMS has asked Sgurr Energy if such a service would be of interest and under what conditions?

"Yes it would," says Project Manager, Allan Drewette. "For small, infrequent single vessel operations, for example met mast maintenance, marine co-ordination is not strictly necessary. However, safety is paramount and anything that improves safety offshore should be considered for a project."

And adds, "The difficulty comes in finding an existing marine co-ordinator (perhaps for a wind farm) who is happy to accommodate another vessel that may have completely different emergency response procedures, or attempting to setup a temporary marine co-ordinator for the duration of the works."

CHALLENGES?

We also asked what the MCC challenges might be from a Sgurr Energy viewpoint? "Presumably there would need to be some level of commonality to the emergency response for the various vessels - which may be from various operators - controlled by the co-ordinator, Drewette suggests.

"Each operator would need to agree to the form of the emergency response and disseminate that effectively to their crews. One of the biggest challenges we have encountered is the communications difficulties associated with far offshore work."

"When working beyond normal VHF range, an alternative communication method is required. Not all vessels will be equipped with long range comms (such as MF-SSB), so other systems such as satellite comms may need to be utilised. However, they come with their own challenges," Allan concluded.

These points are crucial but have established technical solutions.

Green Marine Solutions

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Green Marine Solutions (GMS) has been exploring the potential for regional centres and even a national MC hub, that would optimise O&M resources reliably and robustly, while minimising costs and guaranteeing confidentiality. GMS proposes many answers but consensus views are important. Your comments, opinions and precautionary tales will be welcomed to help with the practical development of this concept.

DIGITAL MARINE CO-ORDINATION FOR BETTER O&M

Can digital technology slash marine co-ordination (MC) costs? Is sharing asset resource data instantly and securely online an attractive economic option? Would a new generation of joint co-operative marine co-ordination centres (MCCs) serving whole UK and European regions revolutionise big offshore project logistical management?

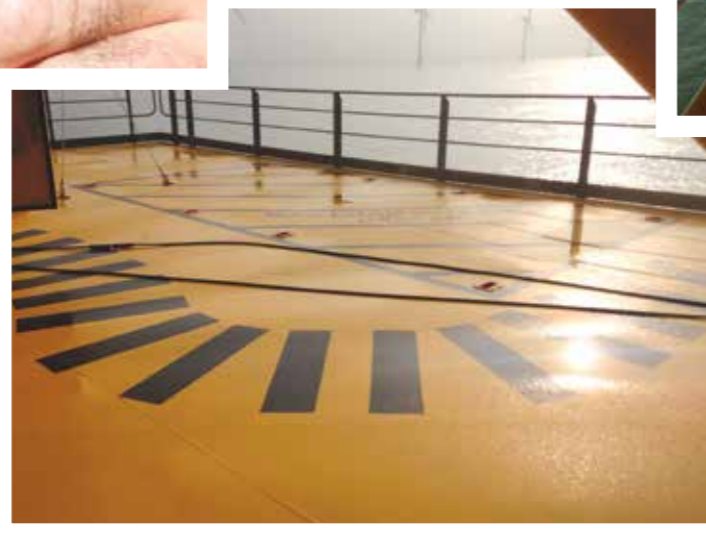
In the ultimate case, could one centralised and digitally-based national MCC accessible across the British Isles 24/7/365 minimise budgets while improving both safety and resource use?

We believe the answer in each case is yes, with strong precedents. Co-operating local companies can share a single extremely-efficient common MC resource, while still maintaining full confidentiality.

Here, we would like to look at the issues involved and invite inputs and views. Log in for instant co-operative answers.

First-class marine co-ordination (MC) which ensures that the right people, vessels, equipment - plus rescue and recovery assets - are in the correct position at the right time for the best price is now essential in all HSEQ-centric O&M activity.

But MC itself has a cost. This, we are confident can now be cut by a new co-operative approach which makes maximum use of modern high-speed information and communication technology.



ANY ANSWERS?

Green Marine Solutions is already working with offshore industry leaders keen to pioneer the advanced MCC concept. Key answers are already known. However, many operators will want to explain their own ideas and specific goals.

Exploring some of the issues involved we hope will encourage a useful discussion.

CHANGING FACE OF MC

To understand why change is necessary, it is important to recognise that the days of the time-served seafarer with a radio working as a pivotal point for MC are over because of complexity.