



The eAquatiCall interview

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Dave McKechnie ... my first 100 days at Aquatic

How aware of Aquatic were you before you joined back in June?

I was aware of the company before joining, of course. I knew about their flexible umbilicals and risers, but I certainly wasn't aware of how big they are and all the areas that they are involved in. I think for me, the key thing is that since I first encountered them back in 1986, the business is now so much bigger, with more technology, new ideas and the team at Aquatic is highly experienced. In short, Aquatic has a huge track record to be proud of.

From my perspective, when you join any business, you want to know the safety record's good, the finance is good, the equipment is in place, and that you'll be working with the best people. Aquatic really has all these things which is exciting because it means we're free to look at new areas without moving the core focus of what we do.

How would you describe your style of management?

I would say I am wholly committed to the safety side of our business; everyone needs to go home intact at the end of the day and that comes out of the quality of the environment in which we work and the quality of the work we do. We have to get things done with the right care, the right conditions, the right attitude.

I'm not a micro-manager, I will not stand over anyone, although I will help anyone with what they need. At Aquatic, the people are a pleasure to work with, they're well-versed in the business and very experienced, and my arrival here has been a highly stimulating and empowering, hopefully for everyone.

How have you found the culture and the people at Aquatic?

Aquatic is very strong on team work. The safety culture is very real here, they're trying to do the right thing by people and the results speak for themselves. The brand is visible and it's something you can take to people who understand what you stand for. I've been very impressed with the whole thing.

The market demand for more equipment in the water is well-known. How has Aquatic responded since you came on board?

It was evident when I joined Aquatic that the team were already on the case. They're on top of meeting those equipment demand requirements, the needs of the industry as it goes deep water, as well as dealing with the needs of emerging markets – like the renewables sector and the new market opportunities in, say, Brazil.

The UK market itself is generally more stable but our customers here still need more capacity and we need to be able to carry more of the customer's product.

Could you explain a little about the concept behind Aquatic's new Flexible Intervention service?

Aquatic is in at the beginning of a new oil & gas or energy field and there at the end but there's a huge scope for us to be there during the whole 25 years of the field's life for cable repairs, dropped objects and so on. This concept of Flexible Intervention – being there whenever customers need us - looks very positive and we're pretty confident about it. We're in negotiations with one manufacturer who is on board, and there's a great commercial opportunity for others to follow.

The cable manufacturer we've been talking with was coming at this at the same place and the same time, and indeed, the vessel people were looking for the reeling expertise, the cable people for the repair teams. Flexible Intervention relies on the core skills and experience people already have, and uses them in an attractive package for the customer in a brand new way. We should certainly be able to offer this in both the deep water and the renewables markets.

The new Acteon Community Initiative is already striking a chord; what is Aquatic bringing to the party for its customers?

It's still in its developmental phase, and it is certainly gaining momentum. It's enabling us to call on other service companies within the Acteon Group to offer customers other packages. In some circumstances you would have traditionally offered one thing only; with this type of set-up everyone's invited to the table to offer their particular expertise so from a customer's point of view, they could deal entirely with Acteon companies but only have one point of contact, the one they're most familiar with. It's got extremely good potential, and we're hoping everyone can see the true benefit of it.

With the global economy struggling currently, how do you see Aquatic's own future?

From speaking with customers and those planning for the future, it's all pretty positive. There are good backlogs and good opportunities for the next couple of years and that gives us encouragement to request new capex for our engineers at Peterhead to go ahead and build new equipment and start new projects. It's all about those relationships we have with our customers, getting alongside them, so that we can truly understand their business needs and their future commercial operations and their requirements.

We're very much focused on building on the relationships that we have. We may well be moving towards having one customer per project engineer, moving towards a more account management style approach, which should reap an even better understanding of the future, being able to fully understand customer needs and requirements which means we're there when our customers need us. That's critical for us but in tandem with that is investing in the right equipment so that we physically have the right pieces in place. The proof is putting our ideas into steel, into things customers can actually use and feel. You have to remember with Aquatic, we actually go out and make the equipment and not just talk about it as a concept. We are always keenly aware that a number of our customers in theory are also our direct competition. Like everything, there has to be this thing called trust, and it's vital we allow our customers to see that we're not taking business from them rather we're assisting them in theirs.

This is where the modularity of our equipment becomes absolutely critical, because we have the capability to move one tensioner half way around the world to where it's now needed, much more quickly than perhaps

others can. We have the great ability to make the back deck work in tandem with what our customers have and so they're not stuck with one particular configuration of equipment local to them, and that's a key element of our offering.

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