



AYOP presents....

Two ladies and three gentlemen in a conversation

The IJmuiden sea lock: *Open for big business.*

The ladies

Alma Prins-Droog
Head of Cargo & Offshore – Port of Amsterdam

Sylvia Boer
Director AYOP – The offshore energy network association

The gentlemen

Jeroen Verwoort
Alderman Economic Affairs and Ports – Municipality of Velsen

Tjeerd Schulting
Managing Director – Damen Shiprepair Amsterdam

Peter van de Meerakker
General Director – Zeehaven IJmuiden N.V.

People had a lot of fun when suggesting new names for the world's largest sea lock, with Sluisje McSluisface being the closest that will mean anything to non-Dutch readers. The winning submission was Zeesluis IJmuiden. Nothing fancy or amusing, just a name that ensures positioning and establishes IJmuiden internationally as one of the most important gateways for commercial shipping in Europe.

The lock's major impact on the economic growth of IJmuiden and the region – and therefore the Netherlands as a whole – is self-evident. But what lies ahead? Sylvia invited four direct stakeholders to exchange thoughts from their own professional perspective. *“Our ambition is to become the capital of offshore wind.”*

Zeesluis IJmuiden, a new highlight in a long list of impressive waterworks. This is the Netherlands at its most expansive – literally. What does the lock mean for your organisation? Or, to put it more concretely, what's in it for you?

Peter: “Accessibility, accessibility, accessibility. The former Noordersluis lock desperately needed replacement after a century, not just from a technical perspective but also due to developments in shipping and the market. Larger vessels mean larger interests and we have to be able to serve the market with reliable facilities and no limitations like long waiting times for the right tide or restrictions related to draught and beam. The new sea lock makes all this possible. We couldn't stand still – the road between Amsterdam and Utrecht was just a country lane 100 years ago, today it's a six-lane motorway.”

Alma: “The reliability factor is extremely important to us, too, and the new lock ensures this for the years to come. It offers long-term continuity in the supply and outflow of goods, raw materials and products, including from non-fossil sources. This enables parties behind the lock to grow in a more sustainable way together with



others in the region. Moreover, efficiency has significantly increased. More vessels can move through the lock at the same time, offering immediate time savings.”

Jeroen: “To us as a municipality the lock has an iconic meaning too for the way it has literally and figuratively put IJmuiden on the international map. There are just a handful of man-made structures that can be seen from space, and this is one of them. We’ve gained a major attraction that is ideal for positioning IJmuiden as the port to be.”

“The finest front door in the world.”

Tjeerd: “I totally agree – accessibility, time savings and the option to accommodate larger vessels are key benefits. To our port, however, the related ambitions are even more important as they give a major positive and stimulating boost. An example is our goal to grow into the third largest port in Northwest Europe and better utilise the space behind the lock – the finest front door in the world. For offshore wind this could mean building larger piers and docks, which I think is a logical next step. But I understand that discussions about use of space are quite complex so we should probably save that for another time.”

Alma: “About that space, Tjeerd, when you welcome the big guns – jack-ups or cruise ships – can they make their turn in the North Sea Canal? I mean the scale increase that the lock enables, is that feasible from your side now? Or do you actually need more space and longer or wider docks?”

Tjeerd: “It is possible for offshore wind. Jack-ups generally don’t need to dock as they lift themselves from the water. But the extra width offered by the sea lock means a next step could be made. And that’s great as we’ve seen various offshore wind projects pass us by in the past simply because the vessels were too wide. I’d say we’re talking at least one project per year, which represents a serious loss in turnover of around 5%. That’s a substantial figure, but also relative as we were able to use the space for other projects instead. But back to the next step we could make: fact is that we’ve already started. We currently have two ongoing offers, including an offshore wind mobilisation project for the US.”

That’s great – an increase in projects and economic growth lie ahead. Does this only apply to offshore wind projects or other types as well?

Tjeerd: “For now we can lean firmly on offshore wind due to the fact that we can only upscale in width. Lengthwise we’re limited to the size of our docks, which are 250 metres long.”

Alma: “The width for offshore vessels to pass the lock was extended from 45 to 63 metres – a significant amount. In late December we actually missed out on an order as the container vessel was 50 centimetres too wide to pass the Noordersluis, and Zeesluis IJmuiden had yet to open. Being able to now receive vessels of this size and process them at the terminals offers serious potential for continued development and sustainable growth.”

Would I be exaggerating to say said that the lock is making a significant contribution to the competitive position of the region?

Jeroen: “No, you’re absolutely right. The lock is in line with our plans to realise an energy port as there is space behind it which is accessible to large vessels. In that respect we are currently following the **National Strategy on Spatial Planning and**



the Environment (NOVI) approach to see how we can optimise the use and efficiency of this space. Taking into account issues such as residential space, workforce, the energy transition and, of course, our circular economic goals, the lock is a crucial part of the infrastructure required. And hopefully the energy port will be too.”

“We have a major advantage compared to other regions.”

Peter: “Obviously the general business climate in the region matters as well; that’s what companies considering a move are focused on. I’ve been told that our clear choice for offshore wind is highly valued. It can become apparent during the orientation process that the presence of a major ship repair yard like Damen Shipyards is seen as a big plus. Large corporates mainly see their considerations through the lens of risk limitation so these factors clearly make a difference. We have a major advantage compared to other regions.”

Alma: “I think there is a distinction to be made between two perspectives; the business climate and shipping. With regard to the latter, being able to continue sailing takes preference and a lock may be considered a hick-up. Now, with the time savings offered by reliability, more efficient lock combinations, tide-independent operation and, last but not least, the back-up of the Noordersluis, we have a very positive competitive position in relation to other seaports.”

Peter, you just said that the choice for offshore wind is highly valued. What other feedback have you received from the market?

Peter: “Jeroen and his activities involving the new name of the lock made a significant contribution to the brand awareness of IJmuiden and generated lots of publicity.”

Jeroen: “It was good fun. A budget of 1000 euros and publicity worth around 400,000 euros I’ve been told. Not bad at all!”

Alma: “The response I get about Zeesluis IJmuiden is very positive and we’re receiving many queries from the market about the new possibilities. From offshore as well as from general cargo, liquid bulk and alternative fuels. This is interesting as, in addition to our goal to facilitate the energy transition and contribute to circular activities, we also aimed to maintain our seaport position and grow in the field of non-fossil cargo. This has now become a reality.”

“The lock is like a business card that’s being distributed worldwide.”

What we’ve yet to discuss but deserves our attention is the people who work at the lock. How do they feel about it?

Alma: “The colleagues involved in operating and planning have made clear how extraordinarily proud they are and their enjoyment of being involved in the entire process, from the first drawings to the opening ceremony. They helped write the operational instructions, tested various elements, participated in sea trials and thought about how aspects could best be designed. We are also still training everyone as part of a continuous process: while the work may be largely the same as what they’re used to, it demands very specific knowledge and skills, both technologically and operationally. Oh, and before I forget: staff are very pleased with their new offices at the brand-new Lock Operation Centre. It’s like they found a new workplace altogether...’



It should last 100 years, but if we look towards the nearer future, what will the lock have brought us in, say, a decade?

Tjeerd: “As we’ve said, I expect the lock to boost the entire North Sea Canal region. In a year or five we’ll have worked out the spatial planning, especially with regard to residential housing ambitions and the port interests. Without the lock, we might have lost sight of this issue. Moreover, the lock is boosting the Netherlands’ reputation as a maritime country, and this will have an impact on the ‘goodwill factor’. All eyes are on us now. The lock is like a business card that’s being distributed worldwide.”

Jeroen: “Without a doubt, the lock has put the ports in the region back on the map. And that’s great as we have the ambition to become the capital of offshore wind. The lock is stimulating this development. In addition, we have expressed a shared ambition with Amsterdam to become the world’s most sustainable cruise destination. We may reach that goal in ten years’ time too.”

“This region determines the success of the energy transition.”

Peter: “Billions will be spent on the North Sea over the coming years and the lock will certainly ensure that a significant portion will come here. Moreover, with regards to the lock and the energy transition, I hope that in ten years we’ll be able to say that the success of the energy transition can largely be attributed to this region. To companies in the chain that settled here. To the hydrogen economy we initiated here, and which allowed Tata to become more sustainable. And to the entire North Sea Canal region that facilitates everything needed to accommodate wind at sea.”

Alma: “In ten years I expect us to be fully facilitating offshore wind both in front of and behind the lock. We’ll also have taken a major step towards increasing the sustainability of the port, the region and the North Sea Canal area. And we’ll still have a solid competitive position as a seaport while growing in non-fossil cargo flows. So not just in the field of offshore, but also in general cargo, containers, agri-bulk, breakbulk, the circular processing industry and alternative fuels, to name a few.”

What could AYOP do to stimulate or accelerate things?

Tjeerd: “In the framework of the local circular economy you could increase promotion of the opportunities the lock offers for decommissioning. In principle, we can now receive vessels with large cargo and facilitate the disassembly of platforms here, too.”

Alma: “Promoting the sea lock is important, but so is the evidence. You could present this to your members by giving a platform to parties who were unable to use the Noordersluis but now have access via the Zeesluis, letting them share their experiences. I have the perfect case you could use.”

Peter: “Brand recognition, a top-of-mind position... That’s where we should be heading. Plus highlighting the self-evident triangle of wind, business climate and the North Sea Canal region. This is a task we can all take on, and especially AYOP.”

This was the sixth in a series of conversations about the latest developments in the sector. If there’s a subject close to your heart that you’d like to discuss with us, please contact Sylvia Boer: sylvia@ayop.com.

AYOP

A dynamic association of over 115 companies, regional government bodies and research/education institutes active in offshore oil & gas and wind energy in the North Sea Canal region. Members have a strong focus on offshore wind maintenance (including cable logistics), drilling projects for gas extraction, changes to and maintenance of work vessels and platforms, and the disassembly of offshore structures and vessels. In other words, AYOP represents the entire offshore industry chain.