

# DECOM NORTH SEA

## THE SEAS OF CHANGE



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*Set up to tackle the main areas of weakness inhibiting UK decommissioning supply-chain capability, DECOM North Sea is working to help drive forward an industry sector estimated to be worth in excess of £35 billion over 30 years*

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**B**rian Nixon has spent most of his career working for major engineering contractors. Around 25 years of his career to be exact, roughly half of those years spent in the upstream, offshore sector, with the rest in the downstream, onshore market.

Following this he spent a period of some eight years as the Director of Energy for Scottish Enterprise. “In this particular role,” he states, “I held a pan-energy role setting the strategic direction for the organisations investment plans across the whole of the energy sector. In doing so my attention was drawn to the offshore decommissioning market.”

It was three years ago that Nixon was subsequently approached to head up a new organisation whose efforts would be focused solely on this particular industry as Chief Executive of DECOM North Sea. “This organisation,” Nixon continues, “came about as a result of sustained consultation with the industry, a consultation that was facilitated by UK and Scottish government agencies that was driven by their recognition that a major programme of decommissioning activity was ramping up in the North Sea.”

As Nixon points out, while the thought process behind decommissioning activities has been well documented, and there has been a long-held understanding that all offshore structures will one day have to be removed at the end of their economic lives, the industry has until now been very good at deferring the start of such work, mostly through the application of new technology or enhanced drilling techniques.



THE QUALITY OF THE ENVIRONMENT AFFECTS US ALL, CLEAN AIR AND CLEAN WATER IS ESSENTIAL TO LIFE AND IT IS INCUMBENT ON ALL OF US TO ENSURE THAT WE DO OUR BEST TO MAINTAIN THEM



It was a year-long consultation process with the industry and various government agencies that brought about numerous recommendations about what was needed to spur activity in the decommissioning sector, the most important being the belief that it required an independent, totally focused industry forum and that is where DECOM North Sea came from.

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Three years down the line and the organisation has evolved to the point where it has some 220 member companies and is moving forward to stimulate a vibrant, efficient and cost effective industry in order to capture the economic benefits that this substantial program of work has to offer.

“Our membership portfolio,” Nixon says, “was always intended to encompass the whole of the oil and gas industry and as such we have worked very hard to achieve and sustain this. Today our members include the



“OUR MEMBERSHIP PORTFOLIO WAS INTENDED TO ENCOMPASS THE WHOLE OF THE INDUSTRY”



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## SQUIBB GROUP

Having established a formidable reputation as one of the premier demolition contractors in its native United Kingdom, Squibb Group has evolved to become a major global force across the controlled demolition and dismantling sectors, taking its knowledge and experience across Europe and into the Middle East regions.

After years of successful oil and gas production, many of the structures in the North Sea are coming to the end of their expected lifespan and under current legislation, over 90% of these structures need to be completely removed and brought on-shore for re-use or re-cycling. This represents a huge challenge to the industry and Squibb Group, as an affiliated member of Decom North Sea, are working closely with industry regulators and government bodies to assess and formulate effective contracting strategies for the removal of these structures in a technically feasible and safe manner.

With extensive onshore and off-shore experience, Squibb Group are committed to developing technically innovative solutions which recognise and address environmental concerns, health and safety of personnel and costs.

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## DECOM NORTH SEA

“WE DO A RAFT OF DIFFERENT THINGS TO PROVIDE OUR MEMBERS WITH A RANGE OF BENEFITS”

owners and operators of offshore facilities, major first tier contractors and a raft of specialist service providers, consultants and professional services providers.”

DECOM North Sea, being a membership organisation, strives to deliver a wide range of benefits to its individual members to illustrate to them what value they are getting from their fee. “We do a raft of different things to try and work with our members individually and collectively to provide them with a range of benefits,”



Nixon highlights. “This includes hosting networking events, conferences, what we call learning journeys and research visits to regions like Norway, the Netherlands and Denmark where we learn about decommissioning activity in these regions and explore the potential for collaboration and sharing of experience and ideas.”

As Nixon has stated, while the concept of decommissioning is well known, there are few companies and indeed few people who have practical experience of a decommissioning project. “As an industry we are still at a very early stage of learning, so in terms of

decommissioning activity in these regions and explore the potential for collaboration and sharing of experience and ideas.”

### SQUIBB GROUP

Squibb Group started work in the Oil & Gas/Petrochemical industry in the 1970's at the Thames hinterland refineries of Coryton, Shellhaven and Canvey Island, eventually becoming a “partner” to Mobil Oil. Amongst some of the major projects undertaken was the demolition of a Catalytic cracker column, in which Squibb became the first contractor to utilise a tower crane for such a project. Feasibility studies have been conducted for Kinsail covering the removal of several gas platforms in the South Irish Sea and having recently extended its services into the Nuclear industry, Squibb Group have been awarded a framework agreement with Magnox for demolition and decontamination of their Nuclear Plants across the UK. [www.squibbgroup.com](http://www.squibbgroup.com)



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efficiency, the development of models, the beginning of cost reduction, this will only be achieved once we get into a more sustained programme of decommissioning projects. There is a lot of learning going on and that is one of the central roles of DECOM North Sea: to share experience from past projects; share what we anticipate about future market activity; how we believe projects are likely to be approached; what

strategies will be adopted; how companies will allocate work; how they will control risks - and generally try to help new companies to the market understand what their business opportunities are."

There is no doubt in Nixon's mind that the next few years are going to be very interesting with the decommissioning industry set to adopt several different approaches to future projects. One of these will be what is dubbed the piece small approach, whereby once the platform and its facilities have been cleaned of all

**£35 BILLION**

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Estimated value of the North Sea decommissioning sector





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**Nigel Jenkins, Sales and Marketing Director**  
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hydrocarbons and hazardous waste it is taken apart using hydraulic shears. The small pieces are then placed in open top containers on supply boats and taken ashore for recycling.

A further option that is regularly used is called reverse installation where separate modules of a platform or facility are cleaned and removed using a heavy lift crane. These are then taken by barge to meet the same fate described during the piece small approach.

The third and final approach, which in fact has yet to be adopted by companies but is a source of considerable interest within the sector involves the construction of a super heavy lift vessel, which is due to come to market around the spring/summer of 2014.

This vessel will have a lifting capacity of approximately 44,000 tonnes, thus having the potential to lift complete topsides or jacket structures.

“If this vessel is to realise its potential,” Nixon says, “it could result in a significant step change in how the

**220**

Members of DECOM North Sea



industry goes about its business, with literally hundreds of man hours being transferred from an offshore environment to onshore locations. Operators clearly see a lot of benefits to such a situation, for example the positive effects it will have on safety performance, environment controls and cost containment.”

Nevertheless, such a development will not be without its complications, posing as it does a number of questions relating to how one would go about freeing such a large structure of hydrocarbons and environment and hazardous waste, and how one would get access to beginning the subsequent demolition process.

This represents just one of the many challenges that the decommissioning sector will undoubtedly have to deal with as it ramps up in the years ahead, but as Nixon concludes, the sheer amount of work and opportunities that lie ahead makes such obstacles well worth finding a way around. “A major production platform in the central or northern North Sea can take in excess of ten years to be decommissioned. This clearly requires a great deal of work to accomplish and the scale of work ahead can really be put into perspective when you think that in the case of the Shell Brent Field alone, it is thought that the decommissioning of the field will take longer and cost more than it took to design and build in the first place.” **BE**

For more information about  
DECOM North Sea visit:  
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