

Masters in surveying

On a regular base, one can see a small vessel branded with an IGL logo sailing along the Zeeland coast. Although not visible, the vessel is gaining ample valuable information about the bottom of the sea during its trip.

IGL is a survey company that offers services in the field of hydrographic, hydrologic, and geodetic surveying. The company was founded in 1981 with a focus on terrestrial survey. “Terrestrial survey has always been a price competitive market”, Jos Cremers, CFO of IGL explains, “which is why in those days, we were primarily active locally in the south of the Netherlands. Our work mainly consisted of measuring the terrestrial situation for residential and commercial construction.”

Solid base

Mr Cremers continues, “In 1991, when Roger Vilters, the son of the founder of IGL joined the company as CEO, hydrography also became an important part of our work. With hydrography, we expanded our activities which really brought our company into overdrive. In 2008, the crisis in the residential and commercial constructions industry brought our growth to a halt. This was very inconvenient for us, as we had just opened our brand-new office in Herten. In those days, we had approximately 1,500 customers in this industry, of which 400 were our active clients per year. Of course, such a broad clientele was comforting and gave us a solid base, however with the entire industry in a low, our business declined too.”

Rijkswaterstaat

In 2011, Jos Cremers joined the company as Chief Financial Officer, and together with Roger Vilters, one of the spearheads was to look for new possibilities. “Back in 2006 and based on our land activity-based name awareness, IGL was granted its first hydrographic assignment to conduct survey works on the Limburg part of the river Meuse”, Mr Cremers says. “When I joined IGL, we were still a small player in the field of hydrographic surveying. On the other hand, not many companies were active in this field, as it requires ample knowledge and the ability to invest in equipment. This made us



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All photos courtesy of IGL.

decide to expand our portfolio in this discipline with a focus on longer-term contracts.” In 2015, the company’s efforts resulted in a first contract with Rijkswaterstaat. Rijkswaterstaat (RWS) is the executive agency of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, dedicated to promoting safety, mobility, and the quality of life in the Netherlands. “Rijkswaterstaat is the Netherlands’ largest user of hydrographic surveying”, Mr Cremers elaborates, “and in this assignment, we were asked to map the beds of the water area of Zeeland, such as the Eastern Scheldt and Western Scheldt River. This mapping is important as the beds of these two rivers constantly change and move under the waterline. Keeping a constant eye on the riverbeds enables RWS to take the right measures to guarantee the navigability of their Zeeland water area.” The work with the Zeeland area was continued after the initial contract and also IGL was selected to also map several Dutch inland waterways from a hydrographic and hydrologic perspective, including the IJsselmeer. Both contracts are for a time span of six years. “We were considered a thorn in the side of the established hydrographic mapping companies, but with the RWS contracts we have become part of the Dutch top in the market for nearshore and inland mapping of water floors”, Mr Cremers proudly states.



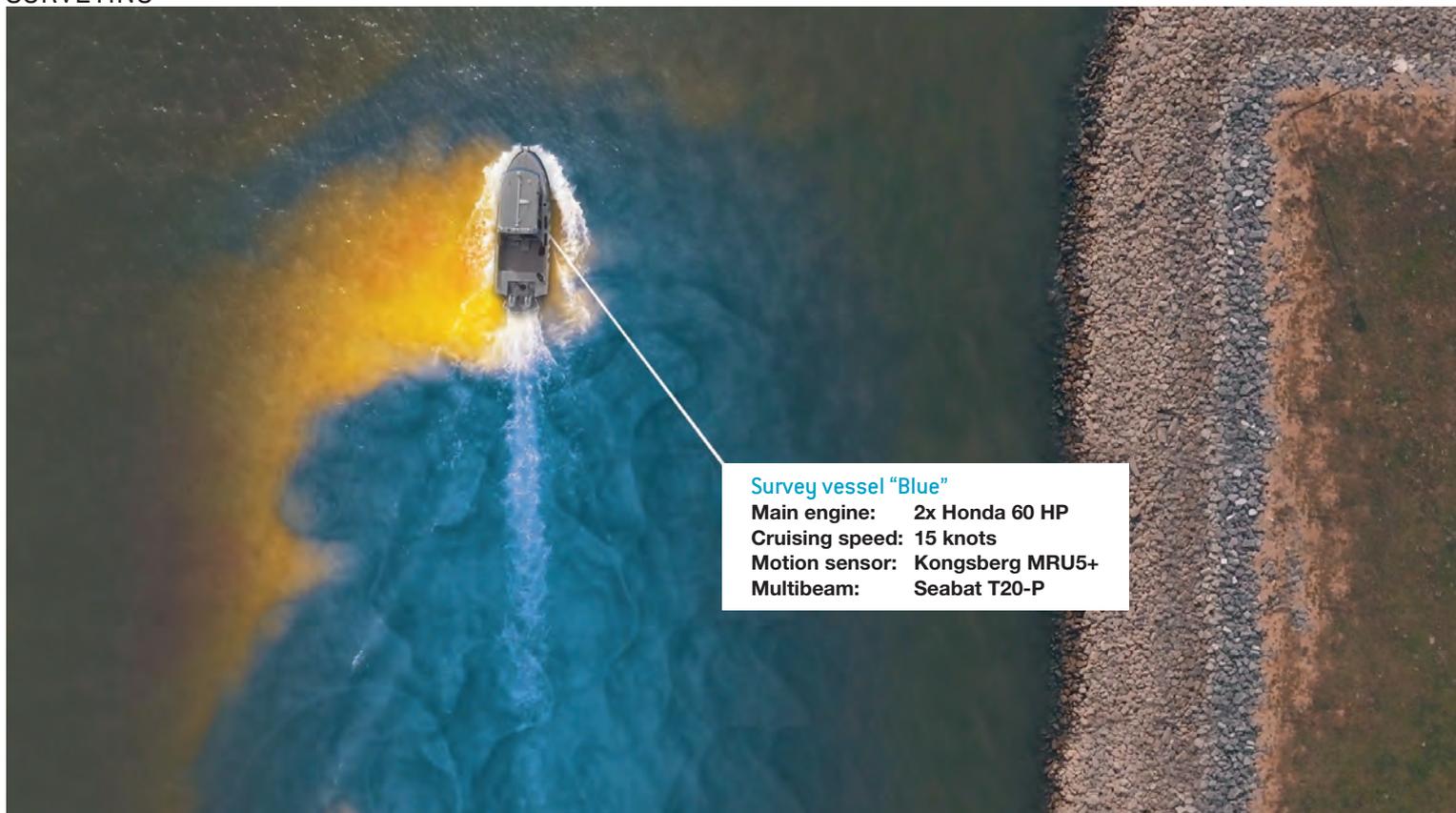
Flexible

Although, through the years, IGL has grown into a company with around 40 employees located in three offices throughout the Netherlands, one in Herten, one in Utrecht, and one in Vlissingen, the company is still able to act fast and flexible. Mr Cremers gives an example of this, “When looking at hydrographic surveying, we have a fleet of small surveying vessels. They are portable and easy to transport with a trailer. This way, they are very flexible to operate at any Dutch inland waterway as well as nearshore to a maximum of 10km off the coast. And in case our customers ask us / require us to go further offshore, we can make use of vessels of our customer, or we hire in vessels from other companies. For example, we recently made use of a CTV that had to transfer technicians to an offshore wind farm. While the technicians were working on the turbines, the CTV had to wait, and during these ‘normal unproductive hours’, we could conduct surveys with the equipment we had installed for this purpose underneath the vessels. Thereby creating a win-win-win; a win for the CTV company and IGL, a win for the windfarm operator for a cost-effective solution, and a win for the environment for minimising the number of movements to and from the windfarm (e.g., less fuel consumption equals less CO₂ exhaust). We have a control



Jos Cremers, Chief Financial Office at IGL.

room in our office in Herten from where the survey could be taken care of remotely. Our people were not on board of the vessel. This saved our customer money and it was also safer, sustainable, and more efficient.” For the upcoming years,



Survey vessel "Blue"
Main engine: 2x Honda 60 HP
Cruising speed: 15 knots
Motion sensor: Kongsberg MRU5+
Multibeam: Seabat T20-P

one of IGL's challenges is to keep staff in line with its growth. "Currently, in order to achieve this (goal), we are making sure that we are a reliable employer and that it is fun to work for us. Another challenge is sustainability, as our company too, will have to take the proper steps to reduce our ecological footprint. One of the steps we have taken in this matter is the investment in the use of fully electric drones for nautical surveys."

Long-term contracts

Having expanded its hydrographic surveying activities does not mean that the other surveying jobs are no longer relevant for IGL. "Apart from hydrographic assignments, we have also been able to attract new business from long-term land-based contracts", Mr Cremers elaborates. He continues, "In 2020, we have been jointly granted an assignment by the Amsterdam municipality. Together with two other companies, we monitor the deformation of all quays and bridges. In 2021, ProRail was added to our list of customers. Together with a second contractor, we are checking the profile of the Dutch rail tracks and the trains' free moving space. Trains need to be able to ride freely, without the risk of touching things. That sounds logical. However, because of slumping of the soil for example, the rail tracks may slightly deform which results in a change of the way trains move over the rail track. To give an example, trains need to be admissible for wheelchairs and therefore the distance between trains and platforms must be as small as possible. This only leaves a small margin for the track deforming as this may result in trains touching the platform. And therefore, it is important to continuously monitor the rail track and the free space available for the trains to make sure ProRail knows when it is necessary to take the right measures in time."

Cake

With an impressive portfolio of many satisfied customers, IGL can call themselves masters in surveying on land and on water. For the future, IGL aims to bring in at least one of this kind of



Keeping a constant eye on the riverbeds enables RWS to take the right measures to guarantee the navigability of their Zeeland water area.

long-term projects every year. "Long-term projects for the larger customers form the foundation of our activities", Mr Cremers voices. "They help us meet fluctuations in our residential and commercial construction activities. The residential and commercial construction industry is quite volatile, whereas the long-term projects are better plannable. Also, the latter allow us to make investments. These investments, together with our flexibility and our efforts to always do what we promise, have brought us where we are now. I often compare our portfolio with a cake. The long-term projects are the base of the cake and the measuring activities for residential and commercial construction form the decoration. Both are necessary for a good looking and tasty cake", Mr Cremers concludes.