

Dredging the IADC a 50-year course

Peter de Ridder stepped down from Van Oord to become truly international
Andrew Spurrier reports

➤ **Dredging executives often like to** portray themselves as civil engineers who just happen to use ships to go about their business. However, some have stronger maritime leanings than others, and Peter de Ridder, president of the International Association of Dredging Companies (IADC), looks to be one of them.

A lifelong yachtsman, he explains without any qualms of conscience that, as a schoolboy, he would rather spend time at the local sailing club than in a classroom.

He says this led to him naturally looking to enter a profession that would keep him in close contact with the sea. De Ridder still enjoys yachting today and he does, theoretically, have more time for it since retiring from operational dredging.

He left his post as operations chief and executive board member at Van Oord, the Netherlands group, at the end of December 2012, after accepting the IADC presidency in September of the same year.

“For me, it was a pretty easy decision,” he tells *IHS Maritime*, explaining that the job required a good knowledge of the leading international dredging groups that comprise the organisation’s membership, and the people who run those groups.

“A lot of people think that the contractor is interested in making the contract as expensive as possible,” de Ridder said, “and that’s not correct. A contractor is interested in making the project as cheap as possible because then the chance it will go ahead is much bigger.”

In more than four decades in the industry, most of them with Van Oord, de Ridder had worked on pioneering land reclamation and offshore and port projects. His retirement

from operational dredging was another factor qualifying him for the post: most IADC members feel that the president should ideally be someone who is not directly tied to a member company.

This structure is explained by the nature of the work carried out by the IADC, which organises a wide range of seminars, conferences, and other worldwide events in order to explain the dredging industry to potential customers and others.

Its work is not, strictly speaking, academic, even if there is an academic side to it; above all, it is not commercial. Bidding for contracts and customer relations is the domain of its individual members, while the IADC’s task is to present the industry’s capacities to those who might use them to carry out their projects.

This involves explaining the industry’s technical capacities and the way they have evolved over the years, as dredgers have gained power and facility, thus reducing the cost of land reclamation for its customers and making bigger projects possible.

The IADC goes further, however. De Ridder says it is today trying to demonstrate to project developers the role

dredging groups can play before contract tendering, helping customers to draw up project specifications and budgets and, by making these operations more cost efficient, save them money.

By the same token, dredging companies are increasingly involving themselves in the financing of projects, which they find themselves undertaking with increasing frequency on an engineering, procurement, and construction basis. This aspect is also starting to feature in the work that the IADC carries out for the industry.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the organisation’s founding in May 1965. This is being marked by special events. A limited-edition book called *Beyond Sand & Sea* is being published to commemorate some of the industry’s big achievements over the past half-century.

Publicising this anniversary is under way in social media, on the internet, and in the group’s magazine, *Terra et Aqua*, which is publishing special articles.

The IADC’s annual week-long dredging seminar in June, a regular highlight of its year, will also celebrate the anniversary. It will be held at the Institute for Water

➤ Peter de Ridder

Key decision:

Accepting the presidency of the International Association of Dredging Companies in 2012, shortly before retiring from Van Oord; was responsible for Changi airport reclamation in Singapore, Chek Lap Kok airport reclamation in Hong Kong, and Palm Island and The World in Dubai

Current position:

President of IADC since 2012

Born:

18 May 1948 in the Netherlands

Career:

1994-12: Joined Van Oord ACZ executive board

1991-94: Manager of Van Oord engineering and estimating department

1983-91: Operating manager of Van Oord Offshore

1973: Joined Dutch coastal erosion specialist ACZ, which came under the control of Van Oord in the early 1980s, as a surveyor and project manager

Education:

1968: BSc in civil engineering

Family:

Married with three children

Peter de Ridder **decision-maker**

Education in Delft in the Netherlands.

The year's main event will be a conference IADC is organising in October in Hong Kong. The city was chosen because of the landmark nature of the projects carried out by IADC members there.

In particular, the IADC hails Chek Lap Kok airport, calling it "a masterpiece of maritime infrastructure" and "a turning point for the modern dredging industry and the beginning of a building boom in Asia".

Completed in 1998 and billed as the most expensive airport construction project in history, it involved the creation of a large artificial island through land reclamation and the levelling of two existing islands.

The scale of the project and the other land reclamation operations that accompanied it led to virtually all leading IADC members taking part, especially Japanese and European operators. "We were all involved in Hong Kong at the same time," says de Ridder, who speaks of the coming reunion as a chance to revive what are clearly very fond memories.

De Ridder is due to retire at the end of this year after three years in post. But he has been asked to stay on "a little longer", provided that the extension of his term is approved at the annual assembly in Hong Kong.

Assuming this happens, he would become the organisation's president as it begins its next 50 years. De Ridder is confident that the group will continue for at least that long, yet does not take it for granted.

In 1965, 38 contractors, then a relatively small number, from 12 countries formed the group. Today, the IADC has become large, multinational organisation.

It is not clear to industry outsiders that they have a great deal to gain by remaining as

an IADC member. "The companies are so big now that they can do everything that the IADC is doing themselves," de Ridder acknowledged. "The only difference – and that's the extra that the IADC gives – is that we represent more than just one company. We represent a group of internationally operating companies."

That may not sound like much but it makes all the difference. The IADC does not try to sell the skills and capacities of any of its member groups individually but acts rather as the interface between the industry and the public, particularly parties seeking to develop ports or reclaim land for construction.

De Ridder argues that the information it makes available assists developers to find the most cost-effective way of carrying out projects by explaining the different technical and budgetary options available.

The IADC has just seven members of staff at its headquarters in The Hague. However, with 10 main

member groups and 100 member companies – taking account of subsidiaries and affiliated companies – it can call on the technical expertise and qualified staff of its member companies to realise its annual publication and events programme.

"It is an independent body," de Ridder tells *IHS Maritime*. "That's why the IADC will survive for the next 50 years.

"Everybody will stay, I'm confident, because there really is a need for an independent institution like the IADC." **F**

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IADC

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