

An aerial photograph of a massive offshore oil rig, likely a jack-up vessel, positioned in the open ocean. The rig is a complex of steel structures, including a large central tower, various cranes, and multiple levels of decks. The rig is surrounded by smaller support vessels and is connected to a large offshore platform. The water is dark blue, and the sky is a pale, hazy blue. The rig's name, 'SEAS', is visible on the side of the main structure.

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*It's been a tough market for heavy lift vessel operators – but that's not stopping them renewing and reinventing their fleets.*

BY ELAINE MASLIN

**T**he offshore installation market has been tough, especially for those with installation vessels – resource and cash intensive assets. Depending on when you start counting from, there have been “three bad years for the installation market,” Edward Heerema, founder and owner Allseas, said, “for everyone. Oil companies have been holding back investment. There is only low-cost development and there's heavy competition. Everyone has been going after the same job, and prices are very low.”

Jack Spaan, expert heavy lift, at Boskalis Offshore Energy takes a stronger word, calling the last three years as terrible and added that, “When I count them it's about four. It's a difficult market and a lot of change has been going on for contractors. Looking for efficiency in operations is very important.”

For Wout Janssens, Director Operations and Engineering, at Jumbo, “The last three to four years were horrendous in our industry. Those still standing recognize what we went through.”

Whatever the words used, there's a theme. Operators have been reorganizing their assets and organizations and seeking new markets, from a full fleet color change (to grey, for Boskalis), to the likes of Seaway Heavy Lifting, now part of Subsea 7, looking to diversification into offshore wind and decommissioning.

The cause of this pain has been the drop in the oil price in 2014 and a slowdown in offshore installation. While some confidence has been returning to the market, it's not necessarily feeding through to fabrication work, as evidenced by the Heerema Fabrication Group's decision to close its Zwijndrecht yard in the Netherlands, after Italian fabrication group Rosetti Marino decided against acquiring the facility.

Yet, contractors, led by the Dutch, who have been the leaders in the offshore heavy lift market for some time, continue to evolve and adapt.

### Allseas

The Pioneering Spirit, introduced by Allseas in 2016, and slated as the world's largest vessel, in terms of gross tonnage (403,342gt), breadth (123.75 meters), and displacement (900,000 metric tons), has proved its capabilities, both for lifting out decommissioned facilities in one fell swoop, to installing new topsides, such as the new 22,000-metric-ton drilling

**Stella Synergy, an Ulstein-designed X-Bow heavy lift vessel for Jumbo, is expected to be delivered in the first quarter of 2020.**





Source: Equinor



topside for Equinor's Johan Sverdrup project offshore Norway last year, as well as the 26,000-metric-ton processing platform topside and the 18,000-metric-ton living quarters for the same development this Spring.

The vessel has also left her mark on the pipelay market, with the installation of the two 930-kilometer-long, 32-inch Turk-Stream pipelines in 2,200 meters water depth. Never before has such large diameter pipe been laid at such depths, with the vessel exceeding lay rates of 6 kilometers per day.

In the first half of 2019, the vessel – the world's largest capacity heavy lift crane vessel with 48,000-metric-ton lifting capacity – will be equipped with a 5,000-metric-ton special purpose crane. Work on the vessel's jacket lifting system, which will go on the Pioneering Spirit's back deck, is also ongoing, with major fabrication contracts now awarded. Initial installation activities are planned to start toward summer 2019, with the delivery and installation of the main components expected late 2019, early 2020.

Despite the torrid environment of the past three or four years, Allseas is also continuing work on the Amazing Grace, a single-lift vessel even larger than Pioneering Spirit.

"No one took us seriously [with Pioneering Spirit] until we awarded the building contract for the hull in 2010. So, when we built it, we didn't know all of [the operator's] plans," explains Heerema. "Some facilities were too long, too high or wide, so we couldn't do them. We looked at what we would need to do all of these." The result is Amazing Grace, which will be able to reach around any platform in the world. "The design has not been finalized, but we are progressing very well," says Heerema.

**Pioneering Spirit installs the processing platform topside for Equinor's Johan Sverdrup development**