

STONE MARINE SHIPCARE ADAPTS TO ADDRESS MARKET ISSUES

A mix of physical presence and online supervision and communication has enabled the UK company to continue to deliver high-quality propeller repairs even in challenging circumstances

Stone Marine Shipcare has been undertaking work at different locations around the world, putting its specialised propeller repair knowledge to good use. For example, a Stone Marine Shipcare team has recently returned from completing a large and complex fixed pitch propeller repair in Qatar. Managing director, Fran Johnson says: "Working closely with the shipyard and customer we ensured both a swift response and a timely repair that was completed ahead of schedule."

In another overseas project, a service engineer recently attended a vessel in Turkey to overhaul a Nakashima TCT-185 bow thruster. The thruster was removed from the tunnel and transported to the Gemak workshop, where the necessary work was carried out.

The company points out that the pandemic has created a need to liaise with customers around the world using online communications, facilitating local preparation ahead of in person attendance by Stone Marine Shipcare technicians to complete the permanent repair.

Johnson says: "The onset of the Covid-19 disruption over the past year presented an opportunity to develop our communications with customers and to enhance the services that we offer. Online and remote supervision of local personnel has allowed work to be completed that otherwise would not have been possible. Furthermore, this work has supported our ongoing commitment to reducing our carbon footprint and operating in a more sustainable way."

One challenge that the company has recently faced is accessing vessels in South America for propeller repairs, as well as the added issue of restricted access to local personnel and limited scope for communications. "Despite the problems, we found solutions by helping to develop the skills and knowledge of local personnel and by working with the vessel's crew to create the best conditions to complete a repair," Johnson comments.

Over the past year, Stone Marine Shipcare has taken the opportunity to reflect on several other issues that the company commonly faces when attending vessels around the world. Johnson says: "We sometimes find that some of the equipment required to complete propeller repairs can be unsuitable or not fit for purpose. The key advance that we have made over the past year is the development of bespoke propeller balancing equipment."

The company has produced a load cell arrangement which is fully portable and allows its technicians to



A STONE MARINE SHIPCARE TECHNICIAN IN ACTION REPAIRING A DAMAGED PROPELLER

balance fixed pitch propellers of up to 60tonnes in weight. Further trials to increase this capacity to 100tonnes are underway.

Johnson adds: "Static balancing is essential when completing a repair to ensure that the balance tolerance is maintained and within the required standards. Portability is the key to the value of this equipment, as it can be folded away and hand-carried anywhere in the world."

One of the encouraging market trends highlighted by Stone Marine Shipcare is rapid growth in the requirement for repairs of smaller workboat and pleasure craft propellers. "We have always worked with smaller propellers, but we haven't always done a good job in telling people about this work," says Johnson. "We have now developed a drop-off and collect service and moving forward we are planning further investment to ensure our capacity meets the future growth of this work."

Stone Marine Shipcare operates next to one of the busiest ports in the UK, the Port of Liverpool. All vessels entering and leaving the Mersey require support, and the company has worked hard to help keep essential shipping moving through the port throughout the pandemic. Significant time has been invested in developing partnerships with local operators, including workboats and pilot vessels, to help ensure that local supply chains are maintained. "Listening to the needs of these operators, ensuring swift responses and cost-effective repairs, has been key to the success of this work," Johnson concludes. ■

