



Luc Vandenbulcke

GeoSea was created in 2005 when the DEME group consolidated its marine activities into a single business with just 12 staff. Today the company's 300 employees work around the globe, serving the wind, oil, gas and mining industries by installing offshore structures and performing underwater site investigations.

We asked CEO Luc Vandenbulcke, about GeoSea's transformation from a builder of jetty foundations to a world leader in marine engineering.

GeoSea

Continual innovation in marine engineering

What sparked the flame of innovation at GeoSea?

Luc Vandenbulcke: We started with a crane and a piling hammer and from that small beginning we knew that we must nurture innovation in order to grow. Our expertise was in building near-shore foundations and we needed to develop ways of working further offshore, perhaps 70km from the coast, in deeper waters.

Today we're constantly filing patents and innovation in technology remains a core driver for our continued expansion. We used to operate rubber boats; now we have high-tech passenger vessels. We've invested in sophisticated self-elevating platforms. We have created our own tools, such as FLiDAR, a breakthrough device for measuring wind speeds far from land. It's now serving the offshore wind industry, significantly cutting the costs of wind resource assessments.

How do you encourage continuous innovation?

We have a dedicated R&D team but everyone has a part to play. Innovation is part of our culture. And it's not just about solving problems, but about finding opportunities to improve industry processes.

For example, the piling needed to install a steel jacket (a platform for a structure at sea) used to take two weeks to complete. With 80 to install, we set about

speeding up the process, putting in the piles before the jacket was attached. This demands incredible accuracy and four years ago, no one dared do it, and they thought we would never achieve it. But we did. Our engineers have also created a robotic tool making it easier to install wind turbines in exposed locations.

What is your biggest challenge in the months ahead?

Without a doubt our challenge is how to cope with growth. We need to hire and integrate new people without losing our core values from our DNA. Our people are so busy with growth that it's difficult to give newcomers the time they need.

One way we solve this is to be very selective in the engineers we hire. We want people who are flexible and keen to learn fast. We then create project teams with a good mix of experienced and junior staff, allowing them to learn from one another.

What's your assessment of innovation in Belgian businesses?

People understand that innovation is needed in order for our products to have a wide appeal beyond our relatively small home market. The government has helped by introducing the patent income deduction scheme and other measures to promote R&D. I see a lot of creativity in Belgian firms and that's exciting for our future.