

## Travel Report Project Visit “Fehmarn Belt Contractors I/S Tunnel Dredging & Reclamation (FBC)”, Boskalis / Van Oord joint venture, April 27-May 3, 2023

For decades, the connection between Rødby (Denmark) and Puttgarden (Germany) has been established by ferries. But now, a 18km tunnel will be constructed between Lolland and Fehmarn, so that cars and trains can continue their journey without any time delay. The nature and scope of this work includes dredging a tunnel trench in the seabed over a distance of 18 kilometers. The dredged material is reused for the construction of a new recreation and nature area on the Danish side of the Fehmarn belt.

A year ago I visited this project in April. Then there was so much equipment working on the water, that I could not visit every unit. This time I had better opportunity to visit all the vessels.

Since I had a planned visit in Groningen, I decided not to fly to Kopenhagen but to drive to Denmark instead. After spending one night in a hotel in Germany, the Autobahn led me to Puttgarden, where I could take the ferry to Rødby.

### Visits

On Thursday April 27, around noon, I arrive in the **project office**. After lunch, I make a quick round and set up a visit schedule with the superintendents. After that, I have a meeting with the project manager, who replaced one of the former project managers.

Next, the reclamation superintendent takes me for a tour on site. It is amazing how much progress has been made in one year! We also have a look at the construction site of the Danish entrance of the tunnel, which has recently started.

Later on in the afternoon, there is a “zeepkist” meeting in one of the hotel rooms, where the different sections of the project team present the current state of affairs. My presence on the project is also introduced. Since today is King’s Day, a BBQ is organized. I can have plenty of conversations. Many staff members I know from last year, but I also see a lot of new faces.

On Friday, I start in the office and go for a coffee a survey boat/crew tender **SC Agate** (Sima). Later on, they bring me to offshore tug **Union Manta** (Boskalis) which pulls a sweeper over the seabed. I have never been on one of this type of tugs before, so it is a new experience for both sides, but I get a very friendly reception onboard and I can sleep overnight. For this vessel, dredging is not the daily routine – normally they are more involved in towing, anchor handling and all kinds of other operations. I meet both watches, have a lot of conversations and admire the sweeping equipment when it is hoisted up above the water level.

Next morning, Saturday, I leave the Union Manta. I am picked up by crew tender **SC Falcon** (Sima) and we head to **TSHD Vox Amalia** (Van Oord). We have to wait till the Amalia is connected to the floating pipeline, and then I can step onboard. There are many other crewmembers than last year (they are partly on leave) so I can have lots of talks. I get a kind welcome by the captain and I am free to have conversations everywhere on the vessel. I can also sleep overnight. Both on the Union Manta and the Amalia, no Filipino crew is allowed – their positions have been taken over by mostly Baltic crew. Some of them are familiar with the dredging industry for a long time, for others it is a new experience.

Sunday: steak day. And a repair on one of the jet pumps is planned; these types of repairs require careful attention. While the work continues, there is some room for watching one of the major sports event of this weekend: the Azerbaijan Formula 1 race. In the meantime, I start my goodbyes. I am picked up by the Falcon and return to the shore. I step on survey boat **Guardian** (Braveheart) which is moored alongside for a Sunday afternoon conversation. At night time, I watch the Dutch cup final together with a group of staff members (a terrible match, by the way).

On Monday I join the morning meeting again. After that, the Falco takes me to crane pontoon **Manta** (Van Oord), which is working not too far away from where the Union Manta is sweeping. I know the barge master from other occasions, which also holds for the chief engineer who is serving his last term. I also get to talk to crane operators and cook.

Half way afternoon, the Agate takes me to multicat **Kilstroom** (Van Wijngaarden) which was ploughing in the tunnel- or work harbour. But it is not operational right now, due to surveying. So, I have every opportunity to talk to the crew, including a cadet. All kinds of different topics are discussed.

The Kilstroom drops me off at tug **Dutch Power** (Bouwman). I had not the chance to visit this vessel last year, but now I have opportunity to meet the crew, which is pulling a pontoon. We talk about the different jobs during the past years.

The Falcon picks me up and takes me to the shore. In the hotel it's time for dinner and a chat.

After the morning meeting I have some talks in the office. Later on, I walk to multicat **Waalstroom** (Van Wijngaarden) which is moored inside the harbour as are other vessels because of the rough waves outside. I also get a warm welcome at this multicat. I visit the Kilstroom again at the other side of the port – in order to meet the other watch. They are lifting the small survey boat **Rocky** (Braveheart) out of the water for inspection.

After lunch in the office, I go to tug **Terramare** (Boskalis) which is pulling one of the Terraferre barges. I have a long talk with the captain about the working circumstances onboard, but I can also meet the other crew from the Baltic states. They are very busy with preparing the barges for further use on the project.

Today, I can greet a special visitor: one of the boardmembers of Boskalis is visiting the project. At night time, in a speech, he expresses his appreciation of the board for all the workers "on the job".

In the Wednesday morning meeting, I am allowed to say a few words of goodbye to everyone. I quote the most famous Danish philosopher: Søren Kierkegaard. I take the 8.45 ferry to Germany, where I visit the FBC office at that side of the Fehmarn belt. It is a short visit, for at this moment it is a small staff. But it is good to see this part of the project as well. After that, I drive back home.

## Evaluation

I really enjoyed this follow-up visit, first of all because there was no sad cause for which I had to travel. It is really amazing to see what can happen in one year on a project.

I also had more time to visit all the units on the project. Moreover, since I knew where everything was located, it was a bit easier to move around.

At the same time, I met a lot of new faces, which also made this visit extra valuable.

Although the project is approaching its final stage, there are plenty of challenges to be met. For example, I learnt about "interfaces" and issues involved.

I want to thank the project staff and all the maritime units for their incredible hospitality. It was nice to be part of your world, if only for a few days. I wish you all the best regarding the completing of the work.

Famous Danish author Hans-Christian Andersen wrote a beautiful fairy tale about an ugly little duck, which turns out to be a beautiful swan. In the beginning a dredging project can look ugly, but this time I already could discover the contours of what is going to be a beautiful construction. I am looking forward to drive through the Fehmarn belt tunnel in the future.

Middelburg, May 6, 2023 – Stefan Francke

