

ICST spoke exclusively to Sarens' commercial director of project solutions, Yannick Sel, to learn how the heavy lift giant is leading the way in lifting and transport work in the energy sector.

NIAMH MARRIOTT reports

Gaining energy



What energy sectors are Sarens currently working in?

Broadly speaking, we work in offshore wind, onshore wind, as well as some gas fired power plants and coal, though we are reducing our involvement in that. The nuclear industry is very important for us, as is solar and hydrogen related projects, and we're seeing more of them come up. Sarens have covered projects in pretty much every energy sector.

So you're phasing out coal and increasing your nuclear sector involvement?

It's not that we're deliberately phasing out coal, there's just fewer projects in the coal sector. In the early 2000s, there were still many coal-fired power plants being constructed, with some large projects in Germany, for example, but they've been completed.

Now we see that a lot of governments aren't entertaining new coal projects anymore.

What do you see as the dominant energy source going forward?

I think it's really going to be a mix. Nuclear is seeing some increase in popularity, although it is susceptible to political views, and can be affected by changes in governments every few years or so. I think offshore wind



Critical headroom considerations led to the design of a temporary lifting device on the South Carolina site

is really going to be the dominant sector for us moving forward. We also anticipate some work with gas related projects, as part of the petrochemical industry. It's a

transition but there is still a demand for gas while the transition is being phased to more sustainable energy sources.

Do you see offshore wind overtaking gas and oil yet or is it still an even balance?

It's roughly 50-50 at the moment but it will keep increasing, that's for sure.

Can you tell me what's going on in the nuclear sector? What are you working on there?

Some European governments indicated they want to be less dependent on gas for their energy supply, obviously, after what happened with Russia and Ukraine, and they're revisiting some of their plans. Nuclear is therefore being revisited and there's some decommissioning work going on. But other companies are saying that they will continue to operate for longer, and that will include some life extension works such as exchange of steam generators, reactor vessel heads, etc.

The UK and France have already signed for new nuclear power plants to be built.

Sarens provided engineering and supply of a barge spread and the PC 6800 crane for the installation of 89 monopiles at the Windpark Fryslân in the Netherlands



“We have to work together with the bigger goal in mind, a more sustainable future.”

YANNICK SEL, Sarens' commercial director of project solutions



We are currently working at Hinkley Point C in the UK, and we have signed a contract to work on the Penly power plant in France. We're also looking into other new plants in UK and Europe.

Other countries, like Poland and the Czech Republic for example, are looking into building new nuclear power plants, too. It's really interesting for us and there is quite a demand for our ring cranes.

We just completed work at Oconee Nuclear Station in South Carolina in the United States – a project we completed in just 12 days. We also involved in the Watts Bar nuclear facility in Tennessee.

We've been involved in the nuclear sector since the 1960s. We've worked on both of the two power plants in Belgium since their inception. We're proud of that work in our 'home base' country but we've been involved in many countries globally over the years with their nuclear efforts, such as in Korea and Finland, etc, so we're everywhere.

Where is the demand for offshore wind coming from? Governments, regulations, customers or consumers?

I think it's from all of them. It's driven by individual countries and their governments and politicians because they are looking at more sustainable energy sources. It is important for governments to create the frameworks for these offshore wind projects, for operators and developers to be able to develop these types of projects.

Obviously in the UK we saw a bit of a hiccup with the last round of bidding where there were no developers interested, because the subsidies are going down and the costs and supply chain are actually going up. I think the whole world is looking for cleaner energy and that's mainly driven by the politicians and what countries want to do.

What does Sarens consider to be the main challenges when it comes to transporting materials and equipment with wind work, both onshore and offshore?

Obviously, everything is getting larger and heavier. With subsidies becoming lower and lower, it's all being pushed down into the supply chain. The industry is expecting newer and more innovative solutions but at the same time, the budgets that are available are becoming less and less. I think that is something we see as an issue.

The other issue we have is in terms of visibility. There are a lot of plans, obviously if all those plans become a reality, the supply chain will not be able to deliver. There will be real scarcity in the market, when it comes to equipment, especially with large equipment.

Everybody confidently says yes, operations are going to go ahead but then a couple of years down the line they may have to delay or cancel. It's really that



Sarens' involvement on the Oconee Nuclear Station project, lifting two huge feedwater heaters, was completed in just 12 days

outlook that's making it difficult, as it's not as stable as we want it to be.

The other point I want to touch on is with floating offshore wind. There's been a lot of different designs. Now I'm a big believer and champion of floating offshore wind but there are two big concerns.

First of all, there's issues with the legal framework, and some countries don't have it in place yet. That brings risk to the developers, where the costs are already higher, so they become less interested in taking those risks. Also, the design of the floaters are so varied, and a lot of the designers are start-up companies. They all expect and want support in terms of engineering and logistics – how to do the installation, the assembly, etc. It requires a lot of our engineering capacity as well. We really want to get engaged early on. We want to support all of them, finding solutions and drive the energy transition, but we know that some of the projects won't be executed in the end.

Do you think there needs to be standardisation for floating offshore wind design?

I think there will be a lot of consolidation in the future, and there needs to be. For example, SBM Offshore and Technip Energies recently announced a joint venture. They both have their designs,



Sarens is involved in many nuclear projects, including the Watts Bar nuclear facility in Tennessee, USA

and continue to take them to market, and ultimately, they are now one company.

Financing is a major issue, as has been indicated before. It is therefore that large players should step up and support these innovative projects.

What do you think the crane industry needs for future wind work that it doesn't yet have?

We need larger crawler cranes and larger ring cranes for the installation and the integration of the wind turbines on top of the floaters. I think they're definitely going to be needed.

They're also needed in the nuclear sector too.

That's where the question mark comes in and how real and tangible are those projects in certain pipelines? That is the big

question. People will need to commit early enough to secure those assets. Developers have their flow and by the time you've assigned equipment to a company it might already be too late, and you need to build a new one.

It's really about getting the right outlook. Everyone looks only at their own projects, but I think sometimes we need to have thinking on a higher level, to also save costs.

We are looking at higher capacity ring cranes. We're continually buying new equipment such as larger crawler cranes and we have our second [Liebherr] LR 12500 that just joined our fleet.

With our 2,500 tonne crawler crane, we're continuously moving up the technical capacity with our equipment. We're always trying to find new and better ways, smarter ways, of executing those projects so that we can also accelerate some of those energy transition projects.

Can you tell me about the latest wind energy project Sarens has been involved with?

The Moray West offshore wind farm project

was a good one. We were given a contract to marshall 60+ XXL-sized monopiles at Invergordon Port in Scotland. Each of the monopiles weighed close to 2,000 tonnes, making these the largest and heaviest ever to be handled. When completed, the farm will boast 60-plus wind turbines. We were acting as the principal contractor on that job and partnered with PSG. So, we provided a whole array of services to that project.

The other one we're executing as we speak is the Hai Long offshore wind project in Taiwan, where we are involved in the jacket marshalling. It's one of the largest projects that our client has ever undertaken. We came up with an innovative solution for jacket handling and we worked in close collaboration with our client with other areas such as the grillage and sea fastening, but we're also doing the marshalling, the storage, etc.

In Taiwan, there's a lot of earthquakes. A few weeks ago, while we were doing the offloading for this project, there was a small earthquake. All of this has to be considered in our planning and engineering. There were no issues during or after the earthquake as

we were operating on the west side and the earthquake was on the east side.



Sarens chose to partner with PSG Marine & Logistics on the Scottish wind farm

Are there any other issues to do with the energy sector lifting or transport that the crane industry should know about?

I think an important thing to share is that with the current

cranes that we already have, like our ring cranes or larger crawler cranes, we are already geared up for the next generation of offshore wind turbines, even up to 25 megawatts. Obviously, there's only a handful of these cranes. The wind turbine manufacturers are under some slight political pressure to standardise. The race for even bigger wind turbines I think should also at some point, stop. We must make sure that there are enough critical assets available to execute all those projects. Politicians can make as many plans as they want, but the entire supply chain has to be able to deliver.

I think we all have to work together as an entire supply chain and really make these projects happen with the bigger goal in mind, a more sustainable future. ■



Sarens installed huge monopiles for the 882MW Moray West offshore wind farm in Scotland