

Clive Jeffery, boat-builder and founder of workboats manufacturer South Boats, tells **Alistair Welch** that the market for offshore wind vessels is growing rapidly

Shipping forecast

When *Offshore Wind Engineering* last reported on South Boats in summer 2010, we explained that the Isle of Wight company had discovered a niche in building boats for serving offshore wind developments. Eighteen months later and that market is no longer quite so niche; as the offshore wind sector matures the demand for vessels - especially larger boats that can operate further off shore

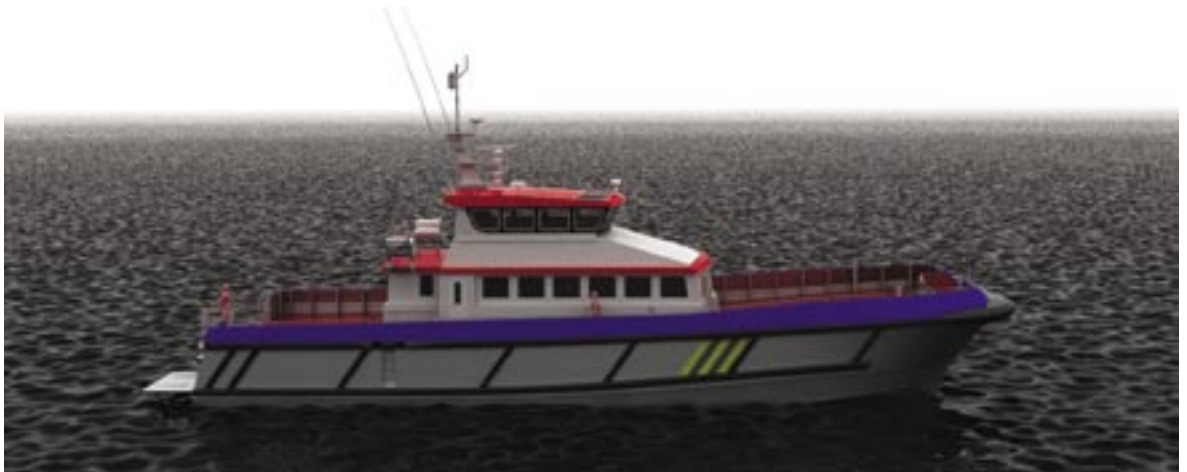
- is ever growing. Clive Jeffery, South Boats' founder, now estimates that 85 percent of his company's business is related to the offshore wind sector.

The company, which builds aluminium and GRP catamarans, entered the offshore wind sector somewhat by chance in 2004 building a single vessel - South Boats now manufactures, at its shipyard in Cowes, between 16 and 20 dedicated offshore wind per year. The company's

vision is to achieve 100 percent growth whilst maintaining a minimum 50 percent global market share of offshore windfarm transfer vessels.

Across the offshore wind sector and associated supply chain, the advent of Round 3 represents a sea-change (pun very much intended). It is no different in boat-building: windfarms of a larger scale, further from shore will demand more from vessels in terms of size,





performance and reliability.

South Boats is currently developing new designs to serve the requirements of Round 3 projects. The boats are designed to comply with DNV Wind Farm Service One and feature modular superstructures for maximum versatility. Site owners and developers have been consulted as an integral part of the design process and the company is monitoring weather and sea conditions on future projects.

"We have already had enquiries for 24m, 26m and 32m catamarans," comments Jeffery. "I think the standard might settle around 26m." In terms of the next generation of vessels, Jeffery explains that his company has been working on a couple of radical things: "We want to specialise in down sea performance. We are in the process of developing new boats that are more successful when they are up next to the turbine. Furthermore, we are fitting specific access systems on our first 19m vessel.

Jeffery predicts a further difference in Round 3 projects: "Our boats have been involved in Round 1 and 2

projects, but one of the major differences in the Round 3 market is that you will not be able to rely on one vessel to do all the work. Developers are likely to need one vessel for installation and then a separate vessel for maintenance."

South Boats manages the majority of vessel design work in-house with bespoke projects starting life on Jeffery's sketchpad. "I didn't study naval architecture at college," he admits, "but because we have had so much sea-time in fast catamarans, designs come out of my head and not out of a naval architecture textbook - as a result we have pushed the design boundaries somewhat."

The boat-builders is constantly evolving in order to meet the changing demands of the offshore wind sector. "We continue to develop, trial and implement new technology and systems to promote the safety and comfort of passengers and crew," explains Jeffery. In recent years South Boats has integrated modular interior furniture, bow docking sensors, thermal imaging cameras and UV search lights into its offshore wind vessels.

The company's philosophy has always been to deliver boats that are comprehensively appointed, rigorously tested and ready for use. With Jeffery's attention to detail and commitment to building boats which meet the ever-more demanding requirements of offshore wind developers, South Boats looks well-placed to take advantage of the increasing demand for specialist work vessels as Round 3 gathers pace.

The business is now targeting global expansion: a number of shipyards in continental Europe have expressed interest in building South Boats vessels under licence and Jeffery suggests that international licences are now the "be-all-and-end-all" of moving forward. Nevertheless, despite the rapid growth of the business, Jeffery has no intention of selling up at this stage: "To be honest, I would like to be here until I die," he says. "I feel it is important to have the right people involved in moving the company forward. My idea is that there will be more to South Boats in the future than just building boats."

www.southboatsgroup.com