

Smit pulls first Australian contract

Dale Crisp

INCUMBENT Svitzer and the aggressive PB Towage have been outmanoeuvred by Dutch giant Smit in winning a new five-year exclusive towage licence for the port of Gladstone.

Smit International, through local subsidiary Smit Marine Australia (SMA), will take up the contract from the start of 2011 and will introduce five new tugs capable of performing liquefied natural gas carrier escort duties as well as conventional shiphandling.

The 70-tonnes bollard pull, 30-metre ASD (azimuth stern drive) tugs will be of the Robert Allan 3070 E design and will be built by Uzmar in Turkey, which has already completed several units for Smit.

SMA commercial manager Australasia Andrea Wilkinson said that while Gladstone was the company's entry into Australia, through the port's public tender process, "in principle we are interested in all possibilities regarding harbour and terminal towage in Australia".

"We have a number of projects under review," she said.

Ms Wilkinson was previously a general manager of strategic development for Adsteam and long-standing P&O Nedlloyd and ACT(A) executive.

Smit's strategy was to focus on stability, especially within harbour towage and terminals (LNG projects) activities by securing long term contracts, she said.

"We look forward to working with all shipping line customers calling at the port of Gladstone and to extending the already strong relationship Smit has with its clients," she said.

"We will also make early contact with the maritime unions to ensure a smooth transition to the new operation.

"A fundamental principle of Smit's industrial policy is to work cooperatively with unions and it is our intention to employ as many of the willing, experienced and qualified current employees as possible as we place a high value on local knowledge."

Smit has performed some tug-and-barge work into the north-west of Western Australia but is otherwise a newcomer to harbour towage in Australia, despite its long international heritage.