

## Upfront investment in quality grabs pays off for top operators

As global port capex remains tight and operation budgets continue to face cost pressures, an Australasian grab manufacturer is sticking to its philosophy of producing high quality, highly productive bulk grabs.

“The global grabs market has seen unprecedented levels of competition develop in the last five years. However our market has continued to grow in response to demand from clients seeking to minimize their ongoing maintenance costs, post purchase,” says PM Grabs manager, Bruce Ennis.

He sees the grab market splitting into two distinct groups recently as a result of the ongoing budgetary pressure operators face in a tight credit environment. That market is now divided by clients seeking grabs with low capital outlays, and those prepared to invest more upfront.

This is a market often involved in greater client-manufacturer liaison and effort on behalf of the manufacturer, but one that results in greater payback for both parties over the life of the grab.

He agrees PM Grabs has never held itself out to be the cheapest bulk grab manufacturer on the market.

“We have found it heartening that a recent global port survey by the engineering corporation Trelleborg indicated the top operators recognize including maintenance costs into the equation when purchasing high cost gear like grabs, is the only true way to evaluate supplier performance.”

The same survey indicated almost half port operators and all port contractors surveyed felt maintenance costs are a greater issue than a year ago. Worryingly, a similar proportion noted maintenance levels had reduced as a result of budget pressures in the past 12 months. The survey noted that more value needed to be given to suppliers who can “demonstrate genuine design and manufacture capability, technical support and customer endorsement.”

“It is good to see PM Grabs can tick the boxes on all those fronts, and explains the calibre of clients we have acquired within the Australasian region, despite this tightening on capex that has happened,” said Ennis.

The company has beaten global competition to acquire some high profile commissions at operations that include P&O Automotive and General Stevedoring (POAGS) in Brisbane and Darwin, the giant Koniambo nickel project in New Caledonia and ISO stevedores in Tauranga New Zealand.

POAGS Brisbane was one of PM Grabs first commissions, and the brief when supplying four 10m<sup>3</sup> remote grabs was rapid payback, minimal down time and high productivity at discharge.

POAGS Brisbane reported productivity gains of 50% and more, fulfilling expectations for the grabs to meet full cost recovery within 12 months of commissioning.

Lighter load cargo discharge operations recorded pull rates of up to 400tph (tonnes per hour) for products like sand, against usual averages of 200tph. Shift time savings are critical at the facility where bulk cargo savings of up to 15 hours in berthing are valuable for ships bound for the busy Newcastle port.

In New Zealand the decision by ISO to opt for PM Grabs' 14m<sup>3</sup> remote release grabs came down to requiring a grab that



incurred lower operating costs and minimal down time during shifts. ISO plant manager Chris Robinson said the company's key operational goal was to maximize hook cycle productivity across the broad range of bulk cargoes and varying vessel types handled at the facility.

“Downtime between 12 hour shifts has been reduced to a mere 15 minutes for hosing chains with oil and greasing,” says Robinson.

PM Grabs worked closely with ISO prior to commissioning, developing features tailored to the company's requirements.

These included such additions as rubber block damping to reduce contact noise between arms and grab head on opening. A two-stage variable damper valve is also fitted to control opening speed, and reduce dust levels at discharge — both additions have ultimately been combined into the common grab design.

The company has developed a range of diesel hydraulic and remote release grabs with a low drift profile, offering maximum productivity and capacity across a wide range of cargoes and facilities. These are proving critical capabilities in an environment where clients are seeking maximum flexibility from high value capital components. Both types of grabs share some central design features including a unique serrated edge and bucket seal design, a low centre of gravity and adjustable bucket opening. The diesel hydraulic models include integrated features to reduce noise and dust emissions, increasingly key requirements from clients at port facilities.

Bruce Ennis is confident the prevailing uncertainty around capex by port operators will ease as prospects for sustained global growth become more certain. With that PM Grabs aims to ride the anticipated surge for high quality equipment. This includes high capacity hoppers that integrate with the diesel hydraulic grabs for an integrated seamless bulk handling system.

“Our confidence is reinforced when you have large global identities pointing to the need for more ‘whole of life’ costs central to the capital expenditure equation. PM Grabs is already fulfilling that need — they may not be the cheapest, but it is equipment that delivers highly productive solutions, with minimal down time and ongoing maintenance, thanks to good design and robust construction.”