

Profile lifting

After expanding into Australia eight years ago, one of the largest heavy lift specialists in the world is slowly growing its presence.

Sam Jordan Jones reports



At the height of the world economic boom in 2008, cranes were as rare as diamonds. Oddly, a one-year-old crane was actually worth more on the market than the price of a brand new crane.

This is because the older crane was available immediately, bypassing the long manufacturing lead times.

However, after the global financial crisis hit there was a crane glut as projects were suspended or canned altogether.

It was around that time that heavy lift specialist Sarens Australia was breaking away from partnerships it had established with Universal Cranes and Trans-Lift five years earlier.

“There are no big investments in Europe so everyone is moving their gear to Australia.”

– Sarens Australia country manager Gert Hendrickx

While it may not have been the ideal time to set up its own operations in the country, even for a global player such as Sarens, Australia was the best option as infrastructure projects in many countries ground to a halt.

Sarens Australia country manager Gert Hendrickx said the stability of the Australian resources market as well as the numerous multi-billion dollar natural gas projects were attracting a flood of international crane companies to our shores.

“We see that in Australia the market is picking up and everyone is moving to Australia,” he said.

“In Europe there is not much work. There are no big investments in Europe so everyone is moving their gear to Australia.”

Not long after severing its Australian partnerships, Sarens moved into new headquarters at Yatala, 40 kilometres south of Brisbane.

Not long after, it bought a 50% share of Perth Crane Hire in Western Australia and established an office in Newcastle, New South Wales.

Earlier this year, Sarens increased its investment in PCH to hold an 80% stake in the business. ▶

The booming resources sector has provided plenty of business for Sarens Australia

The two companies share a plot of land that Sarens bought on the fringe of Perth's metropolitan area.

Hendrickx said the move was beneficial for both companies and the plan was to take full control of PCH. "We have the pure telescopic crane activities together with the crawler cranes, and for the project work we can use their experience and equipment," he said.

"Or Perth Crane Hire, they can say we do not only have telescopic cranes, we have crawler cranes or if you need a detailed lifting plan we can do that as well and SPMTs [self propelled modular transporters]."

"I think there are advantages for everybody.

"But the intention is still to finalise a 100 per cent ownership by the end of 2012."

One of the upsides of a large multinational company such as Sarens setting up shop in Australia is the experience and equipment that comes with it.

Hendrickx said much of the work completed for the Australian resource industry was done in modules.

He said those required considerable engineering work with a thoroughly thought out solution.

"What we did, for example, in New Caledonia recently was the transfer and erection of modules up to 2500 tonnes for a new nickel plant," he said.

"So the project we did there is really full size, full scope.

"We had to pick the modules up in China, put them on the ship and sea transport to New Caledonia, offloading, transport to site and then erection. On these kinds of projects you need the knowledge and to be involved from the start of the project."

Sarens' all-terrain fleet will be dwarfed by the SGC 120, a 3200t ring-based crane the company is building in Europe.

Hendrickx said the company could call on its European assets if needed for projects in Australia.

Sarens is beefing up its Australian all terrain crane fleet this year with the addition of three new Liebherr cranes of 90t, 130t and 250t capacity.

However, these will be dwarfed by the SGC 120, a 3200t ring-based crane the company is building in Europe.

It is also the first crane the company has

designed and built. "It's a big investment cost with this crane, so we are going to start with one," Hendrickx said. "Maybe we are going to build a second one but nothing is signed yet and it's still an idea."

The SGC 120 was recently tested in Belgium. It is specifically designed for refinery, petrochemical, offshore platform and nuclear power plant construction.

"There is a market for this crane but it is a niche market," Hendrickx said.

"It's specially built for major construction work like nuclear power plants - that's something that is picking up worldwide.

"Abu Dhabi is building two, France is building two and the United States."

It can also be transported in segments, which would make it easy if Australia's nuclear aspirations ever took off.

But for now Hendrickx is focusing on growing the Sarens brand in Australia.

He said the Perth depot was big enough to house the company for the next 20 years.

However, the company was also keeping an eye on other sites in the eastern states, Hendrickx indicated.

"If there is an opportunity in New South Wales or Victoria we can buy a piece of land similar to what we have here [in Perth]," he said.

"But our intentions are to obviously expand our activities in Australia." CL

DRA The Humma Crane Range

- HUMMA RC20-25**
- 20 Tonne
- HUMMA UV25-25**
- 25 Tonne
- HUMMA UV35-25**
- 35 Tonne

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