

SEADOG COMMERCIAL  
DIVING SCHOOL

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EDUCATING THE  
NEXT GENERATION



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# EDUCATING THE NEXT GENERATION

*Managing director Bridget Thomson talks about how the provision of commercial diver training is contributing towards South Africa's development as a hub for oil and gas activities*

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Ever since the first commercial offshore saturation dive was performed in the Gulf of Mexico, back in March 1966, the work of offshore divers has proven invaluable to the exploration and production sectors of the oil and gas industry. For nearly 60 years these divers have been responsible for carrying out the maintenance and inspection of offshore oil platforms, as well as the building of underwater structures used in the production process. Without the efforts of these highly skilled individuals the oil and gas sector may very well have struggled to reach such prominence during the latter half of the 20th century.

Established in January 2010 by managing director Bridget Thomson, SEADOG Commercial Diving School is a training centre for the oil and gas industry, specialising in such fields as commercial diving, supervision and diver medic training. Situated within Saldanha Bay, SEADOG's unique location allows trainees to develop under realistic conditions where the quiet waters of the bay provide the perfect introduction to learner divers before they enter the open ocean.

Committed to providing quality, progressive education, using outcome-based skills training, SEADOG promotes student-centred learning. This structure ensures that those individuals trained by the school demonstrate competency through a combination of knowledge, understanding and skills that encourage good performance and safe working practices.

“Personally,” Thomson explains, “I

have been involved in the medical and occupational health and safety sector of commercial diving since 2000. As a result of my own experiences I have been aware for quite some time that there is a strong level of demand for the services that SEADOG offers, particularly in light of South Africa's growing importance within the oil and gas industry."

The role South Africa plays in today's market is further highlighted by its being one of a handful of countries where its accredited diving schools award qualifications that are recognised by the International Marine Contractors Association (IMCA). "What we quite often find with the clients we work with," Thomson continues, "is that they will often select a team of people that they wish to train as commercial divers before then sending that group or team to us to receive the proper education."

While SEADOG Commercial Diving School is a relatively young business in its own right, the experience of its managing director and the trust she has gained throughout the industry have proven to be the catalysts behind what has become a successful, respected operation. "A number of the people that I have trained over the years are today working in key positions in many of the big oil and gas players in the region,"



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Thomson says. "What I believe to be the key to SEADOG's success is a combination of the trust these former trainees turned supervisors, superintendents and managers have in us, our ability to maintain long-term relationships and the way in which we are able to adapt as a business to meet changing

industry needs."

Education, training and development are developing themes across Southern Africa, with all of its major industries being encouraged to embrace change and new ideas, rather than just

maintaining traditional standards and practices. One organisation providing a platform that will allow its members to move forward together is the South African Oil and Gas Alliance (SAOGA).

**1996**  
.....  
Year of the first offshore saturation dive

"It is my belief," Thomson states, "that South African oil and gas companies need to come together and make a stand as a way of showcasing the products, training and services they have to offer. I think

a lot of countries maybe see this part of the world as being a lot less advanced than it really is and bodies like the SAOGA can help change that perception. The SAOGA certainly has the potential to achieve a

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SEADOG's trainers have knowledge and experience in the technical, medical and supervisory fields

## “IT IS CLEAR TO ANYONE WHO VISITS SEADOG THAT IT HAS DEVELOPED A ROCK-SOLID PROGRAMME”

lot more in the years ahead and that will ultimately benefit everyone.”

The progress made by SEADOG over the last two and a half years has certainly been impressive. In that time it has hosted representatives from the IMCA and from international businesses such as those based in Australia, each of whom have been highly complimentary of the school's training and assessment methods and its quality assurance.

“It is clear to anyone who visits us that we have developed a rock-solid programme here,” Thomson enthuses. “What we are doing now to further grow the business is to establish several cooperative agreements with other diving schools and professional bodies.”

It is this approach that SEADOG hopes to extend internationally through the establishment of cross-border cooperatives. “Where we are in Saldanha Bay,” Thomson

says, “you can see from the rigs that arrive on a regular basis and the on-going developments within the harbour areas that there is a good future ahead for the industry in this region. However, this potential is not just limited to South Africa. We are seeing it occurring in the Middle East and across Asia in countries that South Africa has strong ties and relations with.”

Boasting a complement of trainers whose knowledge and experience encompass the technical, medical and supervisory fields, the medium-to-long term goal of SEADOG Commercial Diving School is to leverage this into being able to offer more specialist training courses. This would target other growth areas within the field

such as the work of dive technicians and medical technicians.

Nevertheless, Thomson appears acutely aware that the success of the school is, at least in part, tied to the growth of the region as a hub of oil and gas activity. “South Africa truly does have the means and abilities to offer a quality service to the oil and gas industry. As we ourselves evolve and grow as a business, it is that message that we will look to convey on an international scale.” **BE**

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