



## EDITOR-IN-CHIEF FOR QUARTER OF A CENTURY

As IADC celebrates 50 years of its quarterly journal, it seemed only fitting to speak to its longest standing editor, Marsha Cohen, who stood at the helm of *Terra et Aqua* for 25 years. We caught up with her at her home in Florida to talk about the highs, the lows and a good dose of serendipity.

### When and how did you decide to become an editor?

Well, I left university in the late 1960s with a bachelor's degree in English. At that time, as a woman you either became a teacher or went into publishing and I knew I absolutely did not want to teach. So I landed up in New York and was offered a job at The Viking Press. It was an old, independent, very elite publishing house where salaries were low because you were honoured to be working there. The job they actually offered me wasn't in editorial however, but in production. I was like, what's production? I mean, what does that actually mean?

I found out quickly enough. Production meant doing cost estimates, choosing cloth for covers and paper and doing corrections. In those days all the correction work was done by hand. Sometimes we would get books from England and would have to take all the double "l's" out and remove the "u's" from "harbour". It was wild. Viking had a fabulous list of authors, like James Joyce and John Steinbeck. I learned so much. We would visit printers and typesetting plants. Then slowly typesetting, which was originally done manually with lead, and letterpress printing, were phased out and replaced by electronic setting and offset printing. I always say this stint in production served me well. It taught me the real nitty gritty of the trade. And that's how I sort of fell into publishing.

### What brought you to the Netherlands?

I had worked in a couple of places in New York, then in 1970 I decided that I was done with Nixon, the Vietnam war and all of that. At that time, my cousin was already living in the Netherlands and was saying, "You really have to come over. You'll love it. It's swinging." And so like a lot of young people I did. I was just going to go for a couple of months and then I met Dominique Boer, the man who would later become my husband and well, I stayed. I was actually supposed to go back to graduate school at Columbia University to study creative writing because I really wanted to write. But I just decided, it's okay, I'd rather be in the Netherlands. After a while I got a job at Elsevier.

There I started working on technical and scientific journals, editing the weirdest assortment of subjects. That was my first foray in publishing in the Netherlands. I lived in NL for seven years and was doing freelance work here and there, and had started a family. Then my husband, who was editor in chief working for the VNU, a large Dutch magazine publishing company, had the opportunity to work for them in the USA. So we decided to move. When that job ended, he didn't want to go back to the Netherlands and we decided to stay in the New York area and start our own communications company. It was a challenge. But we both had exactly the same sort of inclinations in communications and anything that came our way we simply took on.





## Meet Marsha Cohen

Marsha Cohen received a degree in English language and literature in the USA. After working at The Viking Press in New York and Elsevier Publishers in the Netherlands, she co-founded a communications company, The Tappan Group BV in The Hague with many governmental clients. In 1991, she became editor of *Terra et Aqua* journal and a PR advisor to the International Association of Dredging Companies (IADC). She has co-edited and written several books on dredging related subjects. Since January 2016, she is a freelance journalist for the dredging industry.

Photo left and previous page @ Alyson Benison

As chance would have it, we started working for the Netherlands Chamber of Commerce in the USA, producing a magazine from scratch promoting Dutch-American relations. A mix of culture and business.

Then via via we were introduced to the new communications director for the Dutch tax office. We had developed a system using algorithms to improve communications and used that to redesign the form for payroll withholding taxes that you fill in when you get hired, which was 12 pages long at the time. There were no computers so they would mail the form to people. The postage costs alone were outrageous not to mention the paper costs. We reduced the form to four pages.

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It proved very successful and is actually in a museum in Germany. The tax office had thousands of forms but they said it couldn't keep working with an American company and needed a company somewhere in the Netherlands. So, we rented out our house in New Jersey thinking we wouldn't be overseas that long, moved to The Hague and continued our company. We hired in a couple of people to join us and in a couple of years we went from a staff of two to 80 people.

### How did you come to join IADC?

Boy Opmeer, who owned a printing company in The Hague that we used, walked into my office one day and said 'I have a client who has a journal and they want me to do it, but I don't speak English. Would you like to work together and bid on it with me?' We made a presentation and they liked it, and we signed a contract for two years. That's how I came to work for IADC, because we were both clients of Opmeer Printing. It was totally serendipitous. Truly, I feel like many things in my life were serendipitous and this was certainly one of them.

### What was your knowledge of IADC?

Zero. Peter Hamburger was the Secretary General at the time and had just been hired. He wanted to change the direction of IADC. I had no clue what dredging was and I had never heard of IADC, so actually I didn't know what direction they were going in because I didn't

know where they were coming from, but he wanted to make IADC more PR oriented. And I had this company, Tappan Groep with 18 graphic designers and so we took the existing journal and made a new design. More readable, more user-friendly for a broader audience.

I don't think as an American I had ever heard the word dredging. I simply plunged in there and said OK, I can make a journal, but you have to tell me what it needs to be about. And Peter and the Public Relations Committee taught me what dredging is all about.

### Can you tell me about the originals of *Terra et Aqua*?

The journal was started by a group of engineers back in 1971. It's first editor was Nic Oosterbaan and it was called Dredging/ Dragage. In those days, it was black and white with technical drawings but it was still quite basic. Somewhere down the line in the 80s, IADC decided they wanted to upgrade. They stopped producing it in-house and hired Elsevier in England to make it. It then became a glossy, colour cover with an image in the middle but black and white inside. The journal was a small fish in the big pond of Elsevier however, and IADC decided they needed to bring it back to the Netherlands. They wanted someone who would just be devoted to *Terra et Aqua* and give it the attention it deserved. The journal then was very low key and was not being published regularly.

When I took over, IADC wanted to publish it three times a year and we started producing 32 pages; 16 pages black and white, and 16 pages with a second colour. Then one day Boy Opmeer suggested that if we were to print the journal four times a year, we would fall under the category of a regular publication, which reduces the mailing rates considerably. We calculated it out and indeed, it created enough financial possibility to publish four times a year. This meant we could bulk buy paper for four issues, which cut down costs even further. The postage cost went down. I guess it was 1993 when we became a quarterly journal. Clearly a case of a magazine printer knowing more about Dutch media law than I. We were a great team with the added value that comes from a real partnership.

Slowly we started expanding the budget because once we saw that *Terra et Aqua* was successfully speaking to people and was actually coming out on time and fulfilling the industry's wishes, things really turned a corner. We started printing in full colour. And increasing the number of pages. Also from an editorial and content perspective, we changed. The journal wasn't just for people in the dredging industry but also for those who come into contact with the dredging industry. The philosophy being that while you might be, let's say a one-time user of the dredging industry's capacity, we – the industry – do this work all the time. We know what we're doing. So depend on us to give you the information and let us explain to you what it is that we actually do. You know, dredging did not always have a great reputation. Protests were not uncommon. NIMBY was a keyword – Not in My Backyard. With *Terra et Aqua* we developed a vehicle to reach out and educate a broader public, to win the trust of decision-makers and stakeholders.

### What are the considerations of producing a journal for a worldwide audience?

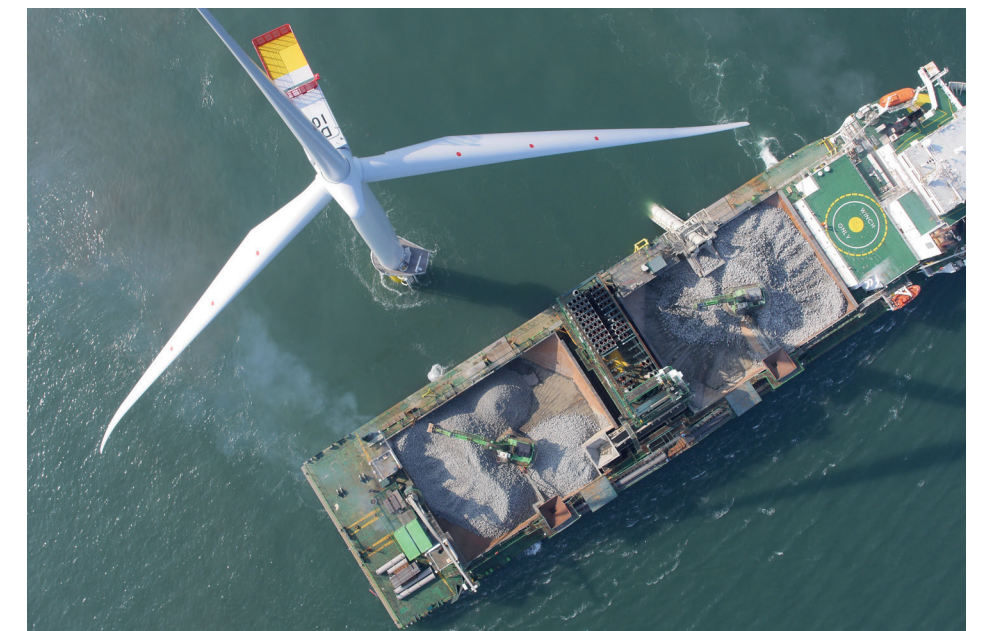
One thing that was very important was to realise that the journal was going all over the world and being read by many people for whom English is a second language. That comes with its own set of challenges regarding how you present information in an understandable way. In addition, you are trying to inform non-technical people. You really had to think about the length of your sentences and how to present tough technical information logically so it could be more easily absorbed. Those considerations didn't always fall into the

consciousness of the dredging community. I mean, they are engineers doing what they're doing. They are experts in science and maths. I said, you have to teach me about dredging and I'll teach you about communicating. That's the deal. And it worked!

### How would you characterise dredging professionals?

I found people in the dredging industry from the get-go to be wonderful. They were warm. They were open. They may not have known anything about graphic design but that was beside the point. People were anxious to share their knowledge with me because I knew nothing and they would spend hours explaining things. These articles would come in and I would say, OK but we have to make this more comprehensible for a person like me. Then we would go through it because what often happens with people who are technical is that they assume that others have the knowledge they have. That's fine if you're writing for a fellow engineer but you can't always assume that with a broader public, especially stakeholders and government officials. My value was in knowing how to write and their value was being able to explain it to me. They were all so enthusiastic about what they were doing and that enthusiasm is totally contagious.

It's interesting, I was having lunch recently with a group of people and everyone was telling about their careers. I had to explain to them what dredging and maritime construction are. How it touches everyday life. Seriously, nobody knew. I live in Florida part time and the New York area the rest of the year. In both places, we are threatened by hurricanes and all the damage that was done a few years ago by Hurricane Sandy. Although the Jones Act imposes limitations on international companies dredging in the USA, the scientists and engineers be it in Europe or the USACE or the Far East, exchange information with each other all the time. The collegiality amongst those in the industry is special. The industry is filled with down to earth people who are excited by what they do. And more than ever in this time of climate change and rising sea levels the industry is so important.



**FIGURE 1**

In the search for renewable energy, the major dredging companies embody the idealism and ingenuity of the mythical Spanish hero, Don Quixote.



When I see the projects dredging companies have accomplished over the years, and I see how much attention is paid to Building with Nature and other environmental remedies. Over the course of three decades, environmental dredging went from contaminated clean-ups and NIMBY to Building with Nature and sustainable development. I think dredging is the workhorse of the maritime industry. It's on nobody's radar until they actually need something and then suddenly their eyes are opened to what the industry is about. And then there's the whole wind energy market with windfarms at sea and plenty of work for the dredging industry. There are some great pictures in *Terra et Aqua* of dredgers off the Belgian coast transporting those enormous wind turbines. It's funny but when I think of windmills, I always have to think of Don Quixote. Oh, those dredgers, tilting at windmills.

#### What impressed you about the dredging industry?

It's innovative spirit. There's so much research that goes into dredging. You mentioned to me you're doing an interview with Kees d'Angremond. He was one of those people that I met in the very beginning. He was part of a generation of people that remembered the floods of 1953. That affected Belgium and England too. Everyone was concerned about what was going to happen and realised that solutions had to be found.

One of the largest projects that came out of that time was the building of the Oosterschelde – Eastern Scheldt Storm Surge Barrier, part of the Delta Works. The construction of dams, sluices, locks and barriers started in 1958 and lasted almost 40 years. It's amazing how the government interacted and worked with the dredging industry to find innovative solutions to protect the low-lying country. Then in the 70s, environmental issues became a major concern and the industry had to change course and figure out a way to operate whilst not disturbing the natural habitat. That was really a huge turning point and I think that was what inspired the young people of Kees' generation. He was one of those people who saw first-hand what happens when you don't take care of your dykes and coasts. It was this major event that was a turning point that inspired this great generation of people.

#### What was one of the projects that fascinated you most?

In the first years that I worked on *Terra et Aqua*, one of the biggest projects that was just beginning was the building of Hong Kong's International airport. One of the things that people always joked about was that when you flew into Hong Kong you flew between the skyscrapers and could literally look out your window and into someone's living room. And it was true. When I flew to Hong Kong for a conference that's the way it was and it was

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really scary. Like, are we gonna make it? And so the British government – it was still British at the time – along with Hong Kong decided to build a much safer airport out at sea.

Various proposals were made. One of them was to knock down a mountain and use the material to create an island on which to build the new airport. Then one of the European dredgers came with the alternative idea to unite a small, hilly island, Chek Lap Kok, with a smaller nearby island, Lam Chau, to create a big enough area on which to build. It took 237 million m<sup>3</sup> of reclaimed sand to transform the islands into a mammoth 1,250-hectare platform secure enough to bear the weight of

buildings and airplanes. At the time, it was the largest reclamation project ever executed and required the deployment of half the world's trailing suction hopper dredgers to Hong Kong. There were the Japanese, the Chinese, the British, the Dutch, the Belgians. And since all the names of the vessels were totally incomprehensible, they gave them all numbers.

The day I flew home from Hong Kong was the day that the bridge connecting the new platform to the mainland was opened. There was no airport yet, just a platform but there were all these boats and ferries, all tooting their horns in celebration. It was wonderful to experience. I mean, that was really the beginning because after that the Far East became the place to be. Dredging companies started winning contracts in Singapore and Malaysia to build land reclamations and artificial islands. And then of course the Middle East opened up, with Dubai and Abu Dhabi and the Palm Islands.

#### You created nearly 100 issues of *Terra et Aqua*. What was your greatest challenge?

The hardest thing was acquisition of articles. I would say that was my number one headache and it made me really appreciate our Public Relations Committee and member companies. That was really the bread and butter of *Terra*, to get articles from our member companies and then fill the journal with other research papers from students doing PhDs as well as companies in related fields. We were always open to those researchers worldwide who wanted to contribute. These are busy people, so trying to get someone to find time in their schedule to write an article and explain what they were doing, that was a challenge.

As was the need for good photography. At that time, we were only printing hard copies. There was no such thing as a digital version and photographs for print need to be a lot of MBs. That said, nobody understood when I would say I need a high-resolution photograph. There was also no such thing as transferring a 10 MB photo at the press of a button, so people used to FedEx and mail me photographs. Some of the companies had fabulous photographs too. The photographs of the building of Hong Kong airport were impressive. As were those of Maasvlakte 2 another monumental project that we covered in its many aspects in *Terra et Aqua*. And the massive projects in Scandinavia, Storaebelt and Oresund. When I first started as editor, the member companies would send out photographers and often make aerial

photographs to capture the projects. It was probably in my first year that I went to every single IADC dredging company and plundered their photography archives. There were a lot of slides too. Remember those?

Then everyone got digital cameras, so instead of paying photographers, they started sending me 'point and shoot' photos made by crew members – of very dubious quality. Whenever I had a chance, at a conference or on vacation, I would go out of my way to take photographs with my high-end digital camera. Trying to explain the photography requirements needed for print and getting good photographs remained tough. Not to mention asking authors to supply photos of themselves. I know it's a serious business, but I'd say, smiling is allowed.

#### What are you most proud of during your time as editor?

There have been many memorable issues of *Terra* but there are three that I stand out in my mind. December 1999 (#77). We were going into the year 2000 and I don't know if you remember, but everyone was sure that the world was coming to an end. Like everyone's computer was going to crash. People wouldn't fly on 31 December. We decided to do a millennium of dredging and hired somebody to help me write the history of dredging: From hand-grab to jumbo. This issue was also the first big change in the cover design and layout. We thought it's the year 2000, we're going to do it all different, which was very exciting. The whole project required a load of research – starting with Leonardo da Vinci – and writing and rewriting and was just enormously interesting.

The second one was the 100<sup>th</sup> issue that we published in September 2005. For that one we changed the whole design again and presented a wide range of infrastructure projects over the past 40 years. It was a deep-dive into the modern dredging industry and a tremendous hunt for photographs. Every IADC member company provided texts about each and every project. In fact it was really a book, and we published both a hard cover and soft cover version and now the whole PDF is online.

My third pick is the June 2007 edition (#107). Because it was so different than anything we'd done before – or since. I think it was ground breaking. Constantine Dolmans was then Secretary General and totally fascinated with Ronald Waterman's concepts. Ronald is really the father of the whole Building with Nature

movement and Constantine wanted to do a special issue based on Waterman's book. His concepts led to the Sand Motor, constructed off the coast near The Hague, and a similar project in the UK. It has revolutionised how we think of using nature to enhance dredging projects rather than working against the natural forces of water and land.

#### What other publications did you work on at IADC?

The longer I was there, the more communication initiatives arose. Rene Kolman, IADC's Secretary General now and the one I worked with the longest, had new ideas and he often asked me to help. We did multiple Facts About brochures and the annual report and the Dredging in Figures report. One of the first publications I worked on was Dredging for Development, a 64-page booklet that came out every few years. The first edition was in collaboration with the International Association of Ports and Harbors, and there have been three editions after that.

One of my favourite projects was when we celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of IADC and created the book *Beyond Sand & Sea*. It was comprehensive and complicated. The book chronicles 50 years of maritime masterpieces from 1965–2015 with 200 pages of photographs and text. I worked with Jurgen Dhollander, who was Senior PR and Communications Officer at IADC at the time and Renato Rauwerda and Melanie Taal. We had a great team. And I think we were all very proud when that launched. Probably one of the last big multi-year projects I worked on was IADC's Knowledge Centre – a massive undertaking and really an incredible resource for dredging. And another great team effort.

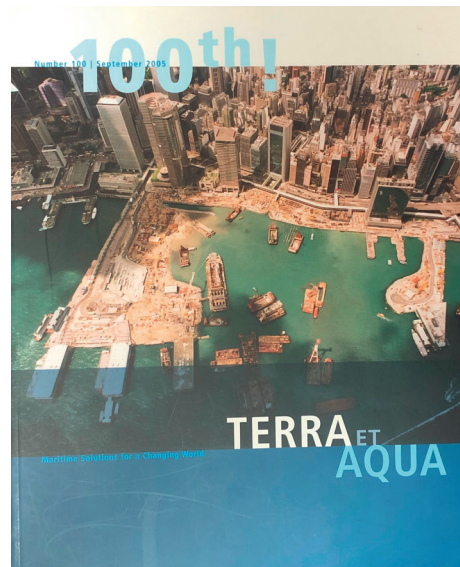
***Terra et Aqua* played an important role in reaching out to make dredging comprehensible to a wider audience.**



FIGURE 2

Aerial overview of the two islands merged into one to create Chek Lap Kok airport.





**FIGURE 3**

Memorable issues of *Terra et Aqua* and the book, *Beyond Sand & Sea*.

**What are your thoughts on *Terra et Aqua* as it is now?**

I think with the redesign back in 2018, that was the moment that *Terra* really blossomed. I mean, visually blossomed and became what it is now. Informationally and technically, it grew over the years and played an important role in reaching out to make dredging comprehensible to a wider audience. But this new design took it to the next level. It was a major decision that was motivated by the *Beyond Sand & Sea* book. I felt like that book was such a tribute to the dredging industry, what it had become and how it had evolved, the attention to the environment, to the development of new technologies, and to finding solutions to really tough problems.

**How did you see the dredging industry change throughout the years?**

First of all, the dredging industry consolidated and the bigger companies acquired or merged with smaller companies. Then the whole maritime industry changed with the arrival of mega container ships, which led to the increase in size of dredging ships – jumbo dredgers – and created so much work for the dredging industry. Ports weren't deep enough to accommodate these ships. Just look what happened in the Suez Canal last year.

A prime example is when the port authority in Panama realised that the canal couldn't handle the growing capacity. Talk about

projects. That was so impressive. To go in there and figure out how to enlarge the canal and to build an extra lock. They had to blast. It's all hard rock. There are a couple of articles in *Terra* on what they did to create that new lock.

What I found so fascinating, not only about *Terra et Aqua* in general but about the dredging industry specifically, was in order to complete a project the importance of stakeholders became key. You can't do anything anymore unless you consult with your stakeholders. They have to understand what you're doing. In Panama, they had a referendum to decide whether or not to allocate money to make the improvements to the canal. The government and the dredgers had to really explain what they were doing, how they were going to do it, how it would create jobs and be a boost to the economy. That was a big change from people just going in and starting to dig somewhere and we'll see where we land up kind of thing.

How you communicate with the public became so important. The dredging industry really picked up and learned from the lessons of others in that regard. As in the case of Shell that was embroiled in a public dispute over the decommissioning and disposal of the Brent Spar, a redundant oil storage installation in the North Sea. The dredging industry looked at what were Shell's failings and thought what lessons can we apply to our projects?

Also in Melbourne, before dredging started to widen the harbour channel in what was a pristine environment, there was a lot of public opposition. There were kayakers out on the water alongside the Queen of the Netherlands TSHD with big signs saying "Tell the Queen to go home!" The dredgers and the government said we have to figure out a way to explain our plans to everyone. As a result, the company spent a long time explaining what it was going to do, and actually learning from the people, listening to the things that were bothering them, and addressing those issues. I think the experiences of the Panama Canal and in Melbourne are both examples of how important transparency can be.

**You travelled to many events around the world. Any standout memories?**

One of the things that I really appreciated about being part of the industry was travelling to so many places and finding out about different cultures. It's an opportunity I don't think I would have ever had in my wildest dreams. You can travel everywhere as a tourist but it's a totally different experience when you're travelling for business. You're there working and are part of a community. And in the case of dredging, it's an industry that is trying to improve the well-being of society. You get such a different insight into the culture, into the economics and the social structures of a country.

That also comes with weird experiences. I remember we were in Kuala Lumpur for a PIANC event and we had a booth.

The secretary of transport for Darwin, Australia invited us all to dinner and I was the only woman in the group. In the Far East, very often they serve a whole fish with the guest of honour getting the head with eyeballs intact. Well, as the only woman I got the honour. I looked at that fish head for a very, very long time but I just couldn't bring myself to eat it.

**And how were your sea legs?**

One of the first times I went out on a ship it was dredging out in the North Sea and we were shuttled out on a tender to the ship. So I'm there with my life vest on and my hard hat, and we climb on board. It's my first time on a dredging ship, so I'm taking lots of pictures, talking to the captain, generally excited by getting toured around the machine room and the bridge. Then the ship returns to shore to discharge its large load of sand. Well, they unload the sand and all of a sudden the ship's much higher out of the water, the ballast is gone. And then came the time for us to disembark. One of the crew simply threw down a rope ladder off the side of the ship and said, "Don't look down or you'll get dizzy and fall between the ship and the tender." And I'm like, OK. I'll just walk back down that ladder. Sort of. I swear it was like walking from the top of a six-story building. I thought how do these people do this? It was really terrifying. Then the colleague I was with starts to descend and he actually looks down, and just freezes. He was just standing there frozen to the spot and the crew literally had to talk him down the ladder. So my sea legs were fine, but I didn't know I had a fear of heights!

**You were editor of *Terra et Aqua* for 25 years and I get the sense no regrets.**

None whatsoever. I feel like my life has just been a series of serendipitous decisions. I mean the fact that I decided to go to the Netherlands in 1970. I actually travelled by a Norwegian freighter from Brooklyn to Antwerp having no idea where Antwerp was, or what they were speaking when I got off the ship. Then I took the train to Amsterdam. When we came into Antwerp, we had to go through all these locks. Now of course I understand why – because the harbour of Antwerp is situated on an inland waterway. So we went through this series of locks and I never thought about it at the time. It was just a great experience, sitting on the deck, watching this ship go up and down. But I realise now these locks are

just one of the things that the dredging industry does.

That reminds me of the *Environmental Aspects of Dredging* book that we wrote. That was also a monumental project. I worked on that with Nick Bray and Gerard van Raalte. Well Nick was in England, Gerard was in Abu Dhabi and I was in the USA. We were on this round the clock schedule with someone, somewhere always working. Oh, and the printer was in India. You know that to me was what dredging was about. Everyone was everywhere all the time, in crazy places. Nowhere is off limits, dredgers without borders. I remember I did an interview once with someone who was working in the Gorgon gas fields off the west coast of Australia. First off, I was in the USA and we had to figure out the time difference. We ended up with him on his mobile phone, standing on this gas platform out in the middle of the sea, giving me an interview.

I don't know, there's something romantic about dredging, the willingness of its employees to venture all over the world, combined with its workhorse practicality and the huge amount of research and innovative thinking that propels it forward. So no, I have absolutely no regrets. I landed up there by chance and I think I just lucked out and had an incredible job for 25 years.

**Are you still involved with the dredging industry?**

When I left IADC back in 2015, I started writing articles for an American dredging magazine so I kept my fingers in the pie for a little bit longer. I got to know the American industry better and the people at the Western Dredging Association (WEDA). I'm actually working on a project for WEDA at the moment. Also, for about five years, I was on call to help out on the *Terra*. I keep in touch with what's going on in the industry. I still read all the newsletters, as well as IADC's website and of course *Terra et Aqua*. I feel like it's kept my brain functioning, having to plunge into the 21st century and keep up to speed with everything. It's all good and in these times of crazy threats from climate change, dredging has a higher profile than ever. The practical implications of maritime engineering and dredging appeal to my inner belief that we are custodians of this planet. I'm glad to be a part of it. Keep tilting at the windmills!

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