

ENERGY

Battle to reduce costs offshore

BY ALLISTER THOMAS

Efforts to reduce the UK's offshore decommissioning bill last year were "largely negated" by 5% of North Sea operators, according to the Oil and Gas Authority (OGA).

OGA has just published its latest decommissioning cost estimate - down 2% overall from 2019's £49.4 billion forecast to £48bn, based on 2017 prices.

But "encouraging efforts" to reduce the bill were "partly compromised" as a small group offset what might have otherwise been a greater reduction.

Seven fields - "the large majority of which lie in the portfolios of just 5% of operators" - were behind the counterproductive trend.

The regulator praised improved project execution and planning, but said the projected performance

"You may find nasties there you had not anticipated"

of some already-high-cost operators had "deteriorated even further".

Nearly one-third of all decommissioning estimates remain "highly uncertain", according to OGA.

Oil and gas expert Professor Alex Kemp, of Aberdeen University, said: "You may have some ideas of what can be in the reservoir, the wells and equipment generally. But when you actually do the work unpleasant surprises can emerge. You may find nasties there which you hadn't been anticipating, that will increase costs."

OGA aims to reduce offshore decommissioning costs for North Sea operators and the UK Government - which foots some of the bills - by 35% from 2017 levels, having already achieved a 19% reduction from a £59bn baseline estimate.



NOW OR NEVER: Ex-footballer Keith Robertson is inspired by Elvis as he rocks in as AVC's new operations director. Photograph by Kath Flannery

Robertson is on the ball to manage AVC

Video: Former Peterhead player has a proven track record

BY KEITH FINDLAY

The audio visual brand communication agency AVC Immedia has appointed former north-east footballer Keith Robertson to head up its Aberdeen operation following the departure of managing director Spencer Buchan.

Mr Robertson was previously general manager for AVC Immedia in Aberdeen and is now operations director.

His promotion comes less than a year after the company's international expansion into the US

and shortly after several contract wins in the UK.

Mr Robertson, who has worked for the group and predecessors of its Aberdeen arm since November 2000, said: "It has been a privilege to have played a major part in the company's growth over my two decades here, and I look forward to helping it grow even further in the years to come.

"We have a talented and dedicated team here at AVC Immedia, and I am eager to help them continue to deliver the high standard of work we are renowned for among some of the

top brands in the UK and beyond. These are exciting times for the company and I look forward to working with our existing clients

"We have a talented and dedicated team here. These are exciting times"

and bringing new ones on board from our offices in Aberdeen, Newbury and Houston."

Mr Robertson was on the books at Peterhead

FC when he joined the business as a senior sports production technician. He also played for Keith, Cove Rangers and Deveronvale. He has been at many of the world's biggest football tournaments as part of teams producing video content for Facebook and YouTube on behalf of the sport's governing bodies.

Newbury-headquartered AVC Immedia employs nearly 30 people across its three offices. Its Granite City operation has its roots in a business supplying video support to Aberdeen FC during the Sir Alex Ferguson era.

AVC, which stands for Aberdeen Video Centres, became a supplier of news and entertainment services to North Sea workers.

Mr Buchan acquired part of it - AVC Media - in 2014 but it fell into administration two years later, a victim of the economic downturn as clients reined in spending.

It was quickly snapped up and rebranded by Immedia Group, an AIM-listed company founded and run by former Radio 1 DJ and Top Of The Pops host Bruno Brookes in a cash plus shares deal worth £250,000.

RETAIL

A better July but it's hard going

BY KEITH FINDLAY

Scottish retail sales took another step in the right direction in July, compared to previous lockdown months, but were still significantly down year-on-year.

Total sales fell 8.3% year-on-year, while the like-for-like figure - stripping out the impact of shops opening and closing - was down by 7.7%.

Latest analysis by the Scottish Retail Consortium (SRC) also shows total food sales grew 3.5%, with non-food sales lower by 18.1% as shoppers continued to prioritise essentials.

Ewan MacDonald Russell, head of policy and external affairs, SRC, said: "Although some high street stores were open throughout July, those in shopping centres, as well as hospitality businesses, were only permitted to open in the second half of the month.

"Summer party and barbecue food both did well"

"Those closures, along with difficult economic conditions, appear to have impacted on both footfall and high street sales.

"Food sales were actually quite close to what would be expected in July, albeit food retailers were only competing with hospitality businesses in the latter two weeks. Summer party and barbecue food did well as Scots sought outdoor food whenever the mixed weather permitted."

Paul Martin, partner and UK head of retail at survey sponsor KPMG, added: "The latest figures highlight the scale of the challenge ahead for Scotland's retailers.

"With store sales down 8.3% year-on-year, we're witnessing a recovery of sorts, but at a worryingly low pace. Once again, food sales have helped to mitigate some of the losses in the industry."

Ex-cop Ross a force to be reckoned with



Robbie Ross has new role

CYBERCRIME

BY KEITH FINDLAY

A former Police Scotland cybercrime expert has joined Aberdeen-based IT firm Converged Communication Solutions to help protect its clients and their data.

Robbie Ross, who was in the force for more than 20 years, most recently in a cybercrime

safety prevention and resilience liaison role, is the company's new chief security officer. He succeeds Gerry Grant, who now works for NHS Tayside.

Mr Ross was a counter-terrorism security adviser with the police before transferring to the force's cybercrime prevention unit.

Speaking about his new role, he said: "Converged has established itself

as a leading provider of cyber security services to businesses in Aberdeenshire, Moray and the Highlands, and it is exciting to be joining the team."

Founded in 2005, Converged has grown from a two-man operation into a fully integrated communications firm with around 30 staff across offices in Aberdeen and Inverness.

Mr Ross's appointment coincides with new figures showing there are about 65,000 cybersecurity attacks on UK small and medium-sized enterprises every day. According to global recruiter Robert Walters and data provider Vacancysoft, about 4,500 of these are successful - and 48% of UK firms do not have adequate cybersecurity to support home working.