

Focus on adding value

A lot of companies decide to start new activities at North Sea Port every year. 2020 was even a record year in terms of land allocated. For many newly settled companies, working from North Sea Port seems to be a success.



All photos courtesy of Vlaeynatie.

In 2015, Vlaeynatie started new activities at North Sea Port's Axelse Vlakte, mainly as a storage, (re)packing, and logistics partner for fertiliser producer SQM. Today, as a result of the successful move to North Sea Port, Vlaeynatie offers services to a much broader range of customers. Time for an update with CEO Paul Van den Broeck.

Service partner

"Since we started in 2015, a lot has happened on our terminal", Mr Van den Broeck says. "Being founded in Gent/Antwerp in 1845, we have a long history in both ports. However, when we were looking for a location for new facilities, we decided to opt for North Sea Port. Apart from taking care of loading and

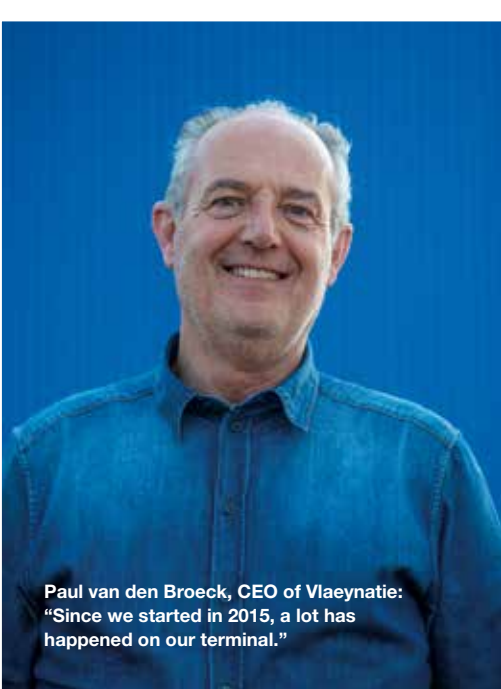
unloading vessels with mainly bulk fertilisers, we also take care of storage and a broad range of value-adding packing services." Soon after the start of the company in 2015, Vlaeynatie anticipated the changing market situation for sugar in Europe and decided to construct a sugar terminal next to its fertiliser terminal, which became operational as Zeeland Sugar Terminal in 2017. "Through a fully automated process of unloading, storing, and packaging food, safety is guaranteed", Mr Van den Broeck comments.

3MCT

In 2017, the company also decided to participate in a new multimodal container terminal, located next to Zeeland Sugar Terminal: TriModal Containerterminal Terneuzen (3MCT). In 2019,



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Vlaeynatie took over trucking company Swagemakers Transport and one of the partners in 3MCT. “With Swagemakers,” Mr Van den Broeck explains, “we were already working closely together in 3MCT and by adding the company to our own organisation, we can now operate in the entire logistics chain: we take care of loading and unloading vessels, storing, sieving, blending, packing and repacking, and the transport to the hinterland by barge, shortsea vessel, train, and truck. For our future success, we are convinced of the fact that we should not limit ourselves to only cargo handling and storage. In order to attract business, it is of utmost importance to somehow add value to our services and we can do so with our skills, and our top-notch facilities and equipment.

Cautious in expanding

Ever since its establishment at North Sea Port, Vlaeynatie has been working on optimising its facilities, which is why it was decided to build an additional warehouse, which became operational in 2018. Now, the company has storage capacity for fertilisers of 200,000t. At the sugar terminal, the two giant sugar silos that cannot be overseen has a total storage capacity of 130,000t. “As a company, we are very cautious in expanding. Growth is of course important, but one should not become too confident in business,” Mr Van den Broeck says. “However, business went well from the start and we soon found out that our storage capacity for fertilisers did not suffice. Therefore, we decided to build additional storage and packing facilities on our



Vlaeynatie operates in the entire logistics chain: loading and unloading vessels, storing, sieving, blending, packing and repacking, and the transport to the hinterland.

terminal.” “Apart from this,” Mr Van den Broeck continues, “we have been constantly working on optimising our processes. For this task, we made various investments such as additional packaging lines for fertilisers, new packaging lines for GMP+ fertilizers, and a state-of-the-art bulk loading station for GMP+ products.”

FSSC 22000

Vlaeynatie not only invested in equipment, but also in other ways to improve. This year, the company started with some good news as the terminal passed the FSSC 22000 certification process. “Traceability is of growing importance in the food industry,” Mr Van den Broeck voices, “and as from now on, we are able to offer our customers a FSSC 22000-certified operation. The FSSC 22000 certificate is the only certificate approved by the GFSI (Global Food Safety Initiative), which means that our entire process is internationally recognised as being safe and completely traceable. Together with our GMP+ certification, this is valuable proof of our efforts to provide safe food storage, handling, and processing to our customers all over the world.

Goeyvaerts-R

Earlier this year, Vlaeynatie started to work together with crane rental specialist Goeyvaerts-R. “Up until now, we have been using the services from Mammoet for loading and unloading vessels. But in the autumn it was decided to end this collaboration. Now, with Goeyvaerts-R and their year-long experience in providing equipment and services for quay operations, we have found a new partner that will help us to further improve our efficiency at the quayside”, Mr Van den Broeck elaborates. When looking at the quay operations, Vlaeynatie last year successfully tried out an unconventional way of loading vessels. “Our 50kg sugar bags are usually loaded and shipped in containers, but with the current high container prices we searched for an alternative solution, which we found in the use of slings. With the use of slings, we were able to load the sugar bags onto a conventional break bulk vessel in a safe, fast, and efficient way. For longer distances, transport by vessel is still the most efficient way and today prices for containers are high because of the high demand, and this way we can offer our customers an appropriate alternative.”



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Any product will do

With fertilisers, GMP+ Fertilizers, sugar, containers, and transport, Vlaeynatie already has an extensive portfolio, yet this does not mean that the company is not looking any further. Of course, our focus today lies on sugar and fertilisers, but with our storage, container, and transport facilities, we can also offer services for other goods”, Mr Van den Broeck says. “In fact, any



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related industry, and it is obvious that demand for handling and storing of fertilisers moves along with the worldwide food market. Although sugar last year did not have its best year due to disappointing yields, we can conclude that we have had a satisfactory year when looking at volume and revenues. Thus, the effects of the corona virus on our activities were limited. However, the virus still imposes a heavy burden on our staff, and this is something that has been, and still is, one of my worries. With our staff of 120, we managed to keep our business going despite of all the corona measures. Everyone took great care of themselves and whenever necessary, no one hesitated to step up. This is something I am really proud of.”

New challenges

According to Mr Van den Broeck, new challenges lie ahead when looking at sustainability and digitalisation. “Today,” he says, “we are already constantly searching for ways to reduce the ecological footprint of both ourselves and our customers. We can offer the most sustainable transport solution with our multimodal terminal. In our own operation, we also seek sustainable improvements. We have decided that in case of any new buildings, sustainability should play a role, for example with the use of solar panels. Another example lies in the digitalisation of our process. Our goal is to reach a paperless workflow, which also contributes to sustainability. With this paperless workflow we will be able to further improve the efficiency of our logistics process. It would be great when trucks that enter our terrain, are automatically noticed and registered, so that truck drivers do not have to enter our office for extensive paperwork. Instead, they could, drive through to the right location immediately upon arrival for loading or unloading. Meanwhile, the entire operation is digitally settled. This would really save time, avoid waiting trucks, reduce mistakes, and make the lives of truck drivers more comfortable. I believe this is something that no one will be against.”

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product will do, as long as we are able to add value to it, as this is the way we want to do business. For future expansion, we have an additional 20ha in reserve on the opposite side of our terminal. We have an agreement with North Sea Port that we are the first company to be notified in case any other party were to show interest in leasing part of this lot. Should this happen, then we will have the first right to lease. Although we do not have specific plans for this terrain, we are already investigating, together with the port authority, the best way to access the additional hectares, as this will be necessary before we start using it. With our current growth, it is good to have a backstop. The expansion on our current terminal also happened faster than expected. This was originally planned to be executed in two phases, but both phases were ultimately constructed in one go.”

COVID-19

When looking at the current COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on business, Vlaeynatie is lucky to be active in the food-related industry. “Our customers all operate in food and the food-