

— PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS: RPS, SEKWANG AND KOREAN OFFSHORE WIND

RPS and SEKWANG Engineering Consultants **signed their first one-year MOU to support Korea's offshore wind industry in 2020**, before being selected to provide environmental and **permitting services for Equinor's Firefly offshore wind farm project**. After a successful start, this valuable partnership has now been extended into 2023. Read on to learn what we believe makes a successful consultancy partnership in offshore wind and how partnerships will benefit the industry – in the maturing South Korean market and beyond.

6 MINUTE READ

South Korea has ambitious plans to boost offshore wind development and generation, but must navigate the challenges experienced by a relatively young market, such as evolving regulations and developing a strong local supply chain. Developers also need to balance understanding and complying with local processes and regulations with the need to guide projects by drawing on international best practice and requirements. This is especially the case on the path to obtaining finance for future wind farms.

In all respects, partnerships will be crucial – pooling talents and resources, while delivering expertise and experience where they're needed. As a 2021 report puts it, *"Partnerships have the power to increase the speed and decrease the cost of offshore wind for Korea, while at the same time allowing domestic companies to leapfrog to best-in-class."* [1]

For Equinor's Firefly project, **SEKWANG** looks after all permits required by local Korean regulations. RPS supports by producing an international standard Environmental Impact Assessment, in parallel to the local EIA. RPS and SEKWANG were chosen for this development as a team, based on our individual track records in delivering major projects. (**RPS has also supported Equinor** on previous international projects.)

This case study explores how the partnership came about, how it achieved synergy, and what makes it unique in the Korean offshore wind market.

Choosing a partner in South Korea: expertise, experience and cultural fit

Our process for finding a consultancy partner for RPS in Korea was robust. The initial longlist included all of the engineering and environmental consultants in this space, from the large to the small, the international and the local.

In defining criteria for our shortlist, we looked for expertise and capabilities in the local market. Track record in offshore wind was also considered, although we weren't expecting to find decades of experience given the newness of the Korean offshore wind industry.

Our chosen partner, SEKWANG, had relevant transferable experience. Well-known for their strength in marine and harbour infrastructure, their impressive resume includes [a long list of major projects in Korea](#). The local consenting and permitting work they do is also similar to what would be required for offshore wind. In addition, they had gained good prior offshore wind experience, having been involved in early site selection review as the local consenting and permitting support for global developers.

We were also actively seeking another important quality: cultural fit. Development projects can be challenging, with testing moments to be expected; it helps to have a shared approach to working through them, rather than finding snags because of partners' different approaches.

Alun Williams, RPS Director - Global Offshore Renewables, says that a similar way of working is one of the great strengths of the RPS-SEKWANG partnership. He comments on the excellent relationship between RPS Country Manager Sangmok (Sam) Roh and SEKWANG Vice President Seung-Joo Jin, who leads SEKWANG's offshore wind business:

"SEKWANG are a strong, technically robust supplier, giving high-quality advice. They work in a very similar way to RPS, and like us, occupy the high-quality end of the market. We have great respect for Mr Jin, who is deeply knowledgeable in his field. The similarity of how we work is a really important part of how RPS and SEKWANG fit together."

Developing the partnership

On making our final decision to partner with SEKWANG, the teams met to agree how to construct our partnership. We were keen to clarify each side's expectations, while getting to know our new colleagues better and identifying how to prepare for future opportunities.

To kick off, we held internal seminars to learn about each other's expertise and experience. These included discussions on topics like the differences between local and international standards. The emphasis was on developing an understanding of each other and our partnership, in readiness for upcoming projects.

In late 2021, Mr Jin and Alun Williams received a joint invitation to present at an academic conference on Jeju Island and each spoke during a series of seminars. This visit led to [**RPS signing an MOU with Seoul National University**](#), one of the top tier universities in Korea. This gives us the chance to share our combined knowledge with other stakeholders in Korea's fast-growing offshore wind industry.

Mutual support: a partnership of equals

RPS and SEKWANG's ability to support each other has been proven during our work for Equinor. When Covid-19 presented unforeseen challenges, making it difficult to mobilise RPS specialists, our link with SEKWANG was invaluable: they were able to call on their network and recommend subcontractors to support the project further.

[**Video: hear more from Sam Roh, discussing how our teams overcame problems created by Covid-19 to successfully launch two LiDAR buoys for Project Firefly.**](#)

For SEKWANG, this is the first international partnership of this type, and so requires a learning curve in terms of international consenting and permitting processes. RPS helps keep the team informed of new regulations and updates, and guides them in the preparation of HSE and other international documentation.

Country Manager Sam Roh says: *"We each have different areas of strength, and even weaknesses. We come together to form a stronger whole, so we can deliver the project more successfully for our clients."*

RPS and SEKWANG's shared commitment to quality and our dovetailing skillsets means that we treat each other as the 'go to' for new projects or opportunities, from international projects to research work. Sam Roh's belief is that a relationship as close as this is "quite a unique way of working in Korea". It is more usual for a smaller company to be contracted to work exclusively for a larger one. Instead, the RPS-SEKWANG relationship is a partnership of equals – leading to mutual benefit, as well as greater efficiency for our developer clients, who can rely on our combined support and expertise.

Helping developers succeed in an evolving regulatory landscape

Working together, RPS and SEKWANG can share learnings and observe challenges happening in the market. We combine to deliver a more rounded view.

Korean regulations for offshore wind permitting are evolving, which is likely to continue as the market matures. However, being able to call on a combination of advisors and expertise will put developers in a strong position. With local knowledge on one side and international standard advice on the other, RPS and SEKWANG are well-equipped to find solutions, giving developers the best chance of keeping their projects on track.

To give an example of why this is so relevant, we have seen some developers treating local permitting and international requirements separately. This runs the risk of project delays in the long term, caused by failure to consider how the different sets of requirements might impact each other. There is also a missed opportunity to achieve synergies between the two programmes. Equinor, meanwhile, has kept local and international aspects together; relevant requirements are considered in parallel, and RPS and SEKWANG have been able to join forces, pooling our knowledge effectively.

Alun Williams adds, *“Regulators and stakeholders need to feel confident in the assessments their consultants make. They must be technically robust to allow solid decision-making. It’s essential in Korea, where there are some known challenges, such as important questions around **co-existence with the fishing industry**. Our work with SEKWANG – combining two already strong partners – offers that vital, technical robustness, of which we are very proud.”*

If you would like to know more about offshore wind partnerships, developing projects in Korea or any other renewables questions, you are most welcome to contact our team:

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[1] [Source: “Accelerating South Korean Wind through partnerships” by Aegir Insights, Pondera Consult and COWI]