LNG Unlimited

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Trinidad LNG benefits from facility upgrades ahead of Juniper start-up

BP onshore compression project to deliver more natural gas supplies to Caribbean nation

Our Americas editor

Juniper venture will tap gas fields 50 miles offshore Trinidad

UK energy major BP has started up an onshore compression project in Trinidad to deliver an additional 200 million standard cubic feet of natural gas per day to the Caribbean nation's liquefied natural gas plant and other customers as part of the larger Juniper offshore venture.

The compression project is expected to increase production from low-pressure wells in BP Trinidad's existing acreage in the Columbus Basin using an additional inlet compressor at the Atlantic LNG plant located at Point Fortin in Trinidad.

Feed-gas

BP said the project would benefit both Atlantic LNG, the liquefaction plant with capacity to produce 14.8 million tonnes per annum of LNG from four trains, as well as Trinidad and Tobago's petrochemical industry.

Because of a lack of feed-gas, the Atlantic LNG plant last year produced just 10.46 million tonnes of LNG, more than 4MT below capacity and 11.5 percent lower than the 11.81MT exported in 2015.

The nation's biggest volumes were directed at South America last year to where 7.37MT were delivered. The largest customer was Chile with 2.38MT.

A further 1.19MT was shipped to the Middle East, with the main customers being Egypt and Jordan.

The largest European importer of Trinidad's LNG last year was Turkey with 490,000 tonnes of deliveries from a total of 950,000 tonnes shipped to Europe. Trinidad also shipped 960,000 tonnes to Asian customers.

Bernard Looney, Chief Executive of BP's upstream business, said: "Delivered on-time and on-budget, this major infrastructure project is part of BP's plan to bring 500,000 barrels a day of new production capacity online by the end of 2017 and paves the way for Juniper, our other major project start-up in Trinidad and Tobago this year."

The Juniper venture comprises a platform weighing nearly 10,000 tonnes in the Caribbean Sea and other infrastructure as part of a $2-billion subsea project to bring around 590 mmcf/d of additional natural gas to Atlantic LNG and other customers.

The regional president of BP in Trinidad and Tobago, Norman Christie, said the mechanical completion of the venture was due to hard work by the government, contractors, partners and other stakeholders.

"Though start-up will be phased, we anticipate an improvement in gas production in 2017 as a result of the project and the planned start-up of Juniper later this year," said Christie.

The compression plant is 100-percent funded and owned by BP in Trinidad. Atlantic LNG Co. will serve as the operator.

The project was sanctioned in July 2016 following agreements between Atlantic shareholders, the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago and other upstream operators.

BP operates in 904,000 acres off Trinidad's east coast and has 13 offshore platforms and two onshore processing facilities.

Offshore fields

The Juniper facility will take gas from the Corallita and Lantana fields located 50 miles off the southeast coast of Trinidad in water-depth of around 360 feet.

Drilling of the five subsea Juniper wells by a semi-submersible rig commenced in May 2015 and first gas is expected in the months ahead.

Feed-gas from Juniper will flow to the Mahogany B hub via a new 10 kilometre in-field flowline which was installed in 2016. ■

UNLIMITED AGENDA

Australian LNG operator Woodside suffers revenue drop because of cyclone weather

Our Asia-Pacific editor

Woodside Petroleum, the largest Australian liquefied natural gas plant operator, posted a drop in overall sales revenue in the first quarter of almost 9 percent as cyclone weather hit production and LNG prices ranged from an average $5.50 million British thermal units at the North West Shelf plant to $8.70 per MMBtu at Pluto LNG.

Woodside's quarterly sales revenue, mostly made up of LNG but also including volumes of oil, condensate and domestic gas dropped 8.8 percent to US$895.4M from US$982.4 in the same three months of 2016.

Calm before the storm: Western Australia export terminal

Partner

At the North West Shelf plant located in Karratha in Western Australia, Woodside posted 13.4 percent lower LNG sales revenue from its one-sixth share of output, amounting to $183.5M compared with $211.4M in the same three months a year ago.

"Production was lower due to adverse weather conditions impacting port operations and higher ambient temperatures," said Woodside, mentioning Tropical Cyclone Blanche and three potential cyclones that led to a drop of almost 8 percent in output at both facilities.

Average daily production rates dropped 7.8 percent at the NWS facility to 45,504 tonnes per day from 49,334 tonnes per day in the same three months of 2016.

Realized LNG prices at the NWS plant were $5.50 per MMBtu versus $6.60 per MMBtu in the year-ago period.

Pluto LNG sales revenue also dropped to $428.1M from $516.1M in the same quarter of 2016.

Production at the Pluto plant, located on Western Australia's Burrup Peninsula, fell about 7.8 percent to 12,505 tonnes per day from 13,574 in the year-ago period.

Average prices of cargoes shipped from the Pluto plant were $8.70 per MMBtu compared with $8.90 in the 2016 quarter.

The Pluto facility is scheduled for a four-day maintenance shutdown in May as plans continued to be examined for its expansion.

"Pluto LNG expansion studies have commenced with an initial focus on developing and accelerating reserves within the Greater Pluto region," Woodside said.

"Contractors experienced in small to mid-scale LNG train technology have been engaged to develop concept options for consideration by mid-year," the company added.

In its marketing and shipping operations, Woodside said mid-term LNG sales and purchase agreements were executed for up to 16 cargoes which will be delivered between 2017-2019.

Woodside said it was also continuing discussions with Indonesian energy company Pertamina to convert a preliminary supply accord into a firm sales agreement.

The company said it was also continuing to expand its interest in the LNG fuel sector.

"The 'Green Corridor' joint industry project to assess the feasibility of LNG-fuelled iron-ore bulk carriers on the trade routes between Australia and China was announced.

"Subsequently, Woodside signed a complementary agreement for a joint design program to explore the suitability of LNG-fuelled propulsion technologies for large ships such as ore carriers," it added. ■

Santos boosted by Gladstone LNG output of equity CSG from Surat Basin and higher prices

Australian energy company Santos said the Gladstone coal-seam-gas-to-LNG plant it operates in the eastern state of Queensland increased production to 1.4 million tonnes for the quarter, backed by strong CSG output from the Fairview and Roma fields in the Surat Basin in the southeast of the state.

First-quarter LNG sales revenue amounted to US$272 million, up from US$216M in the 2016 quarter. Total Gladstone LNG sales revenue increased to $167M.

Santos said its average LNG price achieved during the quarter was $7.09 per million British thermal units compared with $6.19 per MMBtu in the same three months of 2016.

Santos Managing Director and Chief Executive Kevin Gallagher said the first-quarter performance showed that the company's turnaround strategy was delivering positive results.

Adelaide-based Santos has the French company Total, Petronas of Malaysia and Korea Gas Corp. as its Gladstone LNG plant partners.

Santos also has stakes in the ConocoPhillips-operated Darwin plant in the Northern Territory and the ExxonMobil-run Papua New Guinea LNG facility.

During the quarter, PNG LNG operated at an annualised output rate of around 8.3 million tonnes per annum and 27 cargoes were delivered from the Oceania nation to Asia.

"First quarter sales volumes and revenues were impacted by the timing of the delivery of three PNG LNG (delivered) cargoes shipped late March but still on water at the end of the month," Santos said.

"PNG plant maintenance is planned for May, which is expected to result in reduced LNG production rates for approximately three weeks," the company added.

Santos said 14 cargoes were also shipped from the Darwin LNG plant in the Northern Territory.

The company noted that during the quarter it completed the sale of its remaining 50 percent interest in the Mereenie oil and gas assets in the Northern Territory to a subsidiary of Australian banking group Macquarie.

"Our costs have again been reduced, we have improved our free cash flow position and our net debt has been lowered," said CEO Gallagher.

"Our 2017 forecast free cash flow breakeven now stands at US$34 per barrel. This is a significant reduction from the $47 per barrel mark at the beginning of 2016," he added.

The CEO said the company was also striving to make progress towards reducing net debt by US$1.5 billion by the end of 2019. ■

Origin Energy changes head of Integrated Gas to oversee LNG

Origin Energy, the Australian utility and stakeholder in the Australia Pacific LNG plant in Queensland, said its current head of its Integrated Gas division, David Baldwin, was stepping down to be replaced by former Shell executive Mark Schubert.

Sydney-based Origin said Baldwin would hand over to Schubert at the end of April 2017. Schubert is currently General Manager of commercial activities and would take on that role at Integrated Gas from May 1.

"David has had a distinguished career at Origin over the past 11 years," said Origin Chief Executive Frank Calabria.

"As CEO of our Integrated Gas business, his outstanding achievement was executing the Australia Pacific LNG project.

"With Australia Pacific LNG on track to complete its final milestones - and Origin's decision to sell its conventional upstream business - David has decided that it is the right time for him to step down," Calabria explained.

Origin is the main upstream supplier for the APLNG plant, whose other shareholders are ConocoPhillips and China's Sinopec.

Origin has recently set in motion a process of divestment of its conventional upstream business that will allow the company to focus on its Energy Markets business and a simplified Integrated Gas unit.

Prior to his current role, Baldwin headed Origin's LNG business and successfully merged it with its conventional gas assets to form Integrated Gas.

Papua New Guinea LNG expansion plan sets schedule for engineering

Our Asia-Pacific editor

Oil Search, a stakeholder in the Papua New Guinea LNG plant, said the joint venture planning its expansion will start the engineering phase by the end of 2017 as current prices achieved for cargoes averaged US$7.40 per million British thermal units.

The Australian-listed company whose main interests are in PNG oil and natural gas assets said in its first-quarter earnings that a strong performance from the PNG LNG facility was partially offset by lower output from its mature oil fields in the Oceania nation.

Peter Botten, Oil Search MD, praised operations in PNG

Independent

The results come as independent assessments increased the volume of additional feed-gas resources onshore PNG to underpin production at the liquefaction plant northwest of the capital, Port Moresby, and as plans advanced to build more processing Trains.

The existing two Trains at PNG LNG produced at an annualized rate of 8.3 million tonnes per annum in the first quarter of 2017, on par with the record levels achieved in the previous three months, and well ahead of the nameplate capacity of 6.9 MTPA.

Oil Search said its revenue for the first quarter declined by 1 percent to US$343.7 million compared with the previous three months.

"The average realised LNG and gas price was US$7.40 per MMBtu, up 9 percent from fourth-quarter levels, while the average realised oil and condensate price increased 11 percent to US$55.17/barrel," the company stated.

Peter Botten, Oil Search Managing Director, praised operations at PNG LNG and outlined future plans for expansion.

"The operator, ExxonMobil, achieved a very high level of facilities uptime over the quarter, which supported the strong throughput levels.

"ExxonMobil recently commenced marketing up to 1.3 MTPA from the project. The material increase in PNG LNG reserves also means that our other discovered resources can be committed entirely towards high value LNG expansion opportunities," stated Botten.

Oil Search said its booked proven (1P) and proven and probable (2P) PNG LNG project gas reserves increased by 50 percent and 12 percent respectively following an independent certification of PNG LNG gas fields.

Following the completion of its acquisition of InterOil Corp. during the quarter, ExxonMobil became an equity partner in the Elk-Antelope gas field licence, known as PRL 15, along with French energy company Total and Oil Search.

Japanese LNG and power alliance formed by Togas and Kyushu Electric

Tokyo Gas and Kyushu Electric Power have formed the latest Japanese strategic alliance under the government's deregulation policy as companies aim to import LNG on the most economic terms and prepare to share volumes during periods of high demand.

Tokyo Gas uses LNG to produce and distribute city-gas while Kyushu Electric, located in the far southwest of the country, uses the imported gas as regasified fuel for gas-fired power generation.

Togas has formed a similar cooperation agreement with another power generator and LNG importer, Kansai Electric Power.

The Togas-Kyushu partnership will run along the same lines as that with Kansai Electric and compete with other paired utilities, though the first step will be sharing LNG imports.

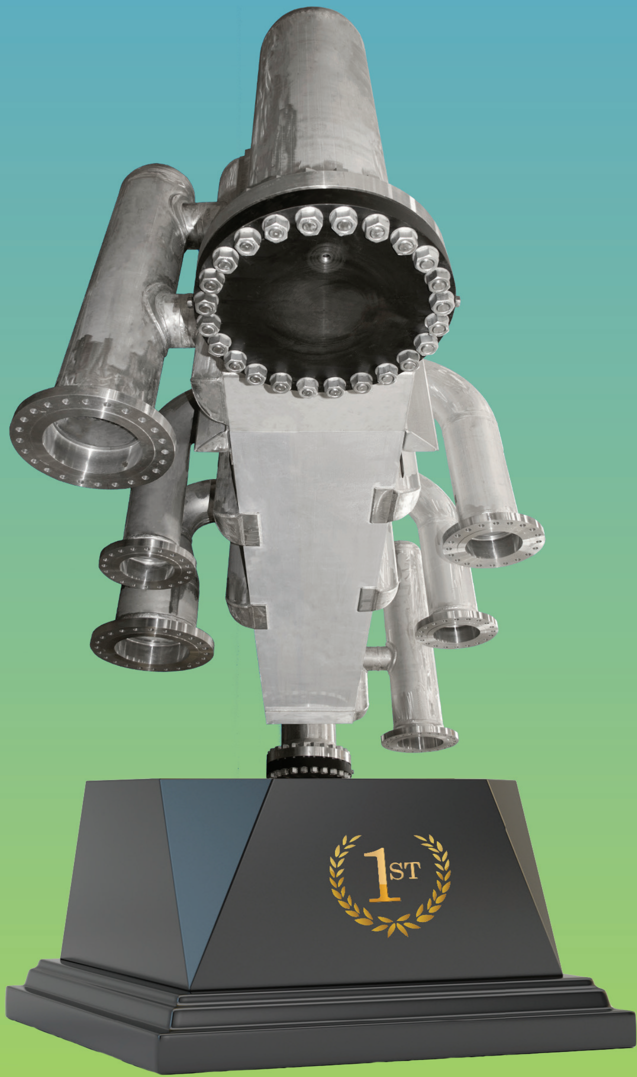
"Cooperation on LNG procurement and transportation will contribute to further flexibility and cost reductions," said a statement from Kyushu and Togas.

The companies said they had already been "strengthening the relationship" in various fields such as the power business and LNG procurement plans.

"We are considering cooperation on securing LNG to ensure stability of supply for both companies, including in an emergency," they added.

The Japanese scope of liberation has expanded gradually. For city-gas and power companies their businesses can now cooperate in gas and power production in utilizing power plants and LNG terminals.

Chart Brazed Aluminum Heat Exchangers



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NEWS NUDGES

Vitol-Gazprom LNG deal

Swiss-based global commodities company Vitol has signed a multi-year LNG purchase agreement for the Russian player Gazprom Marketing and Trading (Singapore) to supply around 300,000 tonnes of LNG per annum from 2018. The supply will come from Gazprom's diversified LNG portfolio. "We are delighted to be working with Gazprom Marketing and Trading, a subsidiary of Gazprom, the world's largest producer of natural gas," said Pablo Galante Escobar, Head of LNG at Vitol. "Vitol is an established participant in LNG markets globally and this development will strengthen our offering to customers worldwide," he added.

Spanish firm is on track

Gas Natural Fenosa of Spain, one of Europe's main LNG players with a supply agreement at Sabine Pass in the US, has held its annual shareholder meeting in Barcelona. Chief Executive Rafael Villaseca highlighted the company's business performance, which was above the average for comparable companies in Europe. Villaseca said that GNF last year obtained 75 percent of its gross earnings from the regulated activities of gas and electricity distribution and the remaining 25 percent from liberalized power generation and natural gas marketing activities.

ABS starts in Houston HQ

The American Bureau of Shipping, one of the leaders of the development of the LNG industry in the US, has broken ground on its new global headquarters in Houston, Texas, comprising a 10-storey building and 326,800 square feet of office space. Completion of the ABS HQ, is scheduled for the end of 2018. ■

Alaska LNG attracts interest of Spence and Beijing as FERC permit sought

Our North American editor in New York

VP Spence (left) in Anchorage with Alaska LNG's Keith Meyer

The Administration of President Donald Trump is taking an interest in the Alaska LNG project with US Vice-President Mike Pence meeting Alaska Governor Bill Walker and officials during a stop-over and the venture itself formally applying on April 17 to receive regulatory permits.

Vice-President Spence spoke during the Anchorage stop-over to Keith Meyer, the President of Alaska Gasline Development Corp. (AGDC), as well as Governor Walker.

Progress

"Our meeting was a perfect precursor to the Vice-President's trip to Asia," said Meyer, of the state's AGDC which took over management of the project from the three oil majors controlling the gas assets, ExxonMobil, BP of the UK and ConocoPhillips.

The AGDC said the talks with Spence were followed by it formally applying to obtain all necessary permits from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and other agencies for Alaska LNG.

The LNG project has three major components: a gas treatment plant located at Prudhoe Bay where the huge feed-gas resources are located, an 800-mile pipeline to southcentral Alaska with up to five offtake points for in-state use and a natural gas liquefaction plant in Nikiski to produce and export the LNG.

The AGDC President pointed out that Pence was scheduled to meet with leaders in key Asian LNG purchasing nations who were close allies.

"We had an excellent briefing and discussion with Vice-President Pence about the Alaska LNG project," said Meyer. "The project will be the United States' largest energy export project and will help fortify the nation's ability to export LNG to the Asia-Pacific region," stated Meyer.

Meyer said Pence was the latest of several senior officials to take on interest in the project.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, returning to Beijing after meeting with President Trump, visited Anchorage on April 7 where he met with Walker and Meyer.

"The three leaders discussed the project and how Alaska and China are well positioned for a long-term LNG trading relationship," the AGDC said. ■

Texas project of former Shell executive Eisbrenner signs Nasdaq listing deal

The US Rio Grande LNG project development company in Texas run by former Royal Dutch Shell senior executive Kathleen Eisbrenner has signed a definitive agreement to become a listed company on the Nasdaq global exchange through a reverse takeover.

Eisbrenner's company NextDecade has used the services of a specialized firm called Harmony Merger Corp. to achieve the transaction.

The Rio Grande export venture, which is advancing through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission permitting process aimed at building a plant to produce 27 million tonnes per annum of LNG, will be able after the listing of NextDecade to raise funds easier from stock issues and other market transactions.

Tellurian Inc., another development company controlled by former Cheniere Energy Chief Executive Charif Souki, recently completed a reverse takeover of a small oil and gas exploration outfit to give Tellurian a listing on the Nasdaq to help funding for its Driftwood LNG project in Louisiana.

Cheniere itself was the vanguard company of the new wave of US LNG developers on the Gulf Coast. It now has three production Trains on stream and is valued at more than $11 billion, according to its latest share price on the New York Stock Exchange. Completion of the Nasdaq listing transaction for NextDecade is expected to close late in the second quarter of 2017.

"We believe a transaction with Harmony will strengthen our ability to bring competitively priced, US-produced LNG to the world market," said Eisbrenner.

"Our choice of proven technology and our strategic South Texas project location combined with our experienced management team and strong industry relationships are some of the many reasons that both potential customers and investors have demonstrated interest in NextDecade," she added. ■

Permian Basin feed-gas headed for Gulf Coast LNG via Kinder Morgan pipeline project

Our North America editor in New York

Kinder Morgan, one of the largest US pipeline companies, and Colorado-based DCP Midstream have signed a letter of intent for DCP to participate in the development of the proposed Gulf Coast Express Pipeline Project to ship Permian Basin natural gas to the Texas Gulf Coast and its LNG projects.

The Gulf Coast Express Pipeline is designed to transport natural gas through a 430-mile, 42-inch pipeline from near Fort Stockton in northwest Texas to Agua Dulce on the southwest coast, just north of Brownsville where several LNG export projects are planned.

Export route

The system will also facilitate exports of pipeline gas to Mexico.

Kinder said the pipeline is expected to be in service in the second half of 2019, subject to shipper commitments, and will bring ample natural gas from the Permian Basin area.

The Permian is described as the engine of America's energy resurgence with prolific oil and natural gas and natural gas liquids (NGL) resources.

It is about 250 miles wide and 300 miles long and spans areas of both West Texas and southeast New Mexico. It encompasses several sub-basins, including the Delaware Basin and the Midland Basin.

"We are excited to be partnering with one of the larger natural gas marketers in the Permian Basin area, with DCP Midstream currently marketing approximately 600 million cubic feet per day of natural gas in that region," said Kinder Morgan Natural Gas Midstream President Duane Kokinda.

"We believe DCP's strong Permian position, when combined with the downstream market connectivity of Kinder Morgan's Texas Intrastate network, creates a valuable project for both producers and markets," added Kokinda.

A non-binding open season for firm natural gas transportation is currently in process.

It is anticipated that DCP will be a partner and shipper on the proposed pipeline to be built and operated by Kinder.

DCP is the largest natural gas liquids producer and also a natural gas player in the Permian.

"This opportunity presents a welcome competitive alternative that adds diversity to the market," said Wouter van Kempen, DCP Chairman, President and CEO.

"DCP has a premier portfolio of integrated assets in the Permian offering a full range of services," he added.

Kinder pipeline expected to be in service in late 2019

Storage firm GTT posts lower quarterly revenue as orders steady

Gaztransport and Technigaz (GTT), the French maritime storage tank specialist, said first-quarter revenues fell almost 3 percent to 56.8 million euros ($62.4M) as new orders were gained for four floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU) vessels and one conventional LNG carrier.

GTT said revenues related to royalties stood at 53.5M euros, down 3.4 percent. Royalties related to LNG carriers and ethane carriers decreased by 6.6 percent to 46.7M euros.

As sector leader in LNG storage for ships, GTT is able to sell licensing agreements around the world for up to $10M per licence to install its membrane technology in vessels, mostly built at South Korean shipyards.

The Euronext-listed company also recently launched the No. 96 Max, an optimized version of the No. 96 system used in more than 120 LNG carriers to date.

GTT continually advances its research and development work and has successfully marketed its very latest Mark V membrane technology.

At the end of March 2017, the GTT order book stood at 87 units comprising 72 LNG and ethane carriers; 10 FSRUs, two FLNG hulls, two onshore storage tanks and one LNG bunker barge.

GTT confirmed its previous revenue target for all of 2017 in a range between 225M euros and 240M euros, with a net margin ratio above 50 percent.

"The first quarter of 2017 saw GTT win four new FSRU orders, reflecting the entry of new importing countries into the LNG market, which confirms the long term growth perspectives on this market," said Philippe Berterottière, Chairman and Chief Executive of GTT.

Norwegian floating LNG company forges German-Singapore links before US work

Our Europe editor

Norwegian company Global LNG Services (GLS), a developer of floating liquefaction hulls, said it planned to work with Siemens of Germany and Sembcorp Marine of Singapore on projects, including one on the US Gulf Coast.

GLS said its vessels are on track to be used for the proposed Main Pass Energy Hub, offshore Louisiana.

How the standardized GLS Liqui-Max vessel will look

Two hulls

The Main Pass venture will make use of two GLS vessels with combined LNG production capacity of 24 million tonnes per annum.

The project holds a permit from the US Department of Energy allowing the export of LNG to countries having a free trade agreement with the US.

"With the Main Pass Energy Hub LNG export project, GLS will be able to offer LNG buyers liquefaction, storage and offloading (of LNG) for a tolling fee down to US$1.75 per million British thermal units," the Norwegian company said.

"Our intention is to work with Siemens and Sembcorp Marine to develop our low-cost FLNG solution," added GLS, established in 2013.

"The standardized Liqui-Max vessels require minimum customization and enable developers of LNG export projects in remote locations without infrastructure to achieve low costs and high cost control," GLS explained.

Siemens and GLS are in discussions regarding a memorandum of understanding which is expected to be signed over the next few weeks. GLS is also in discussions with Sembcorp Marine regarding a similar agreement.

GLS said Sembcorp would provide innovative and experienced engineering support from its Tuas Boulevard shipyard in Singapore.

The Norwegian company said its protected technology enables large-scale, commercially attractive production of LNG worldwide. The Liqui-Max vessel at 380 metres in length will produce 12 MTPA.

"Sembcorp Marine is very pleased to collaborate with GLS on the development of the Liqui-Max vessel," said Sembcorp Marine Head of Rigs & Floaters William Gu.

"We believe this floating liquefaction solution can contribute to making LNG more globally accessible as a greener fuel alternative," added Gu.

Skangas appoints Kimmo Rahkamo to replace Osmundsen as new CEO

Skangas, the Norwegian liquefied natural gas supplier and facility operator, has named Kimmo Rahkamo as its new chief executive in succession to Tor Morten Osmundsen.

Skangas, a subsidiary of Finnish gas company Gasum, said Osmundsen would continue in his role until May 15 to ensure a smooth handover.

The new CEO is aged 54 and has been a member of the Skangas board since 2014.

He has also spent a major part of his career in leadership positions in the Nordic oil and gas industry.

"He has held several senior positions at Finland's Neste, including Executive Vice President at Neste Oil, and also served as Vice President for Supply and Oil Refining at Fortum," Skangas said.

Skangas has LNG production plants in Risavika, Norway and Porvoo, Finland, as well as LNG reception terminals at Pori in Finland, at Ora in Norway and Lysekil in Sweden.

The Nordic company is also developing Finland's second LNG import terminal at the port of Tornio to be operational in early 2018.

Skangas and parent Gasum are also involved in widening LNG use for trucks and for small-scale distribution and bunkering in the Nordic and Baltic regions.

"Kimmo Rahkamo is highly experienced and has an impressive track record in business management and in the oil and gas business," said Johanna Lamminen, Skangas Chairwoman and CEO of Gasum.

Rahkamo said that he saw LNG having a remarkable growth potential in the region.

"Skangas is the leading player in the Nordic LNG market and I'm honoured to have been given the opportunity to lead this company and to respond to the needs of a growing market," added Rahkamo.

Skangas said Rahkamo's predecessor Osmundsen had strengthened the company's position in the LNG value chain and successfully constructed LNG infrastructure stretching throughout the entire Nordic region.

Japanese LNG import prices rise amid more short-term cargo volumes and surge in coal

Our Asia-Pacific editor

Japanese liquefied natural gas imports stayed in the high end at more than 8 million tonnes for March, in line with the volumes purchased in the same month a year ago as prices rose and power generation companies opted to buy more thermal coal.

Latest imports of LNG amounted to 8.14MT for the month, the same as in March 2016.

Competitor

The shipments were underpinned by Australian shipments and spot and short-term contract volumes.

While year-on-year LNG cargo volumes were unchanged, imports of thermal coal for power generation, a competitor to LNG, rose 5.6 percent to 9.64 million tonnes.

Japan's LNG imports had amounted to 7.79MT in February compared with 7.43MT in February 2016.

The March 2017 LNG imports cost Japan 367.85 billion yen ($3.37Bln), a price rise of 6.5 percent compared with the 345.49Bln yen paid in March 2016.

The February 2017 imports costs were 359.16Bln yen ($3.21Bln), a rise of 1.6 percent versus February 2016.

The imports for all of 2016 amounted to 83.34MT, a decline of 2 percent on the previous year. Those shipments cost the equivalent of $28.94Bln, a drop of 40.4 percent compared with 2015.

The Finance Ministry data showed that Asian imports from nations such as Malaysia and Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Brunei were little changed from a year ago at 2.50MT.

Imports from the Middle East region fell by 14.2 percent compared with March 2016. The shipments from countries like Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman totalled 1.83MT.

The figures showed that 140,000 tonnes of LNG arrived last month from the US.

Monthly Russian shipments, mostly from the Sakhalin Island plant in the Far East, dropped 8.5 percent in March to 717,000 tonnes.

The balance of March LNG imports from other nations in the preliminary figures surged to 2.96MT, covering shipments from countries such as Australia and Nigeria, as well as from the spot market.

Canadian fund to acquire stake in the largest South American LNG import terminal in Chile

One of the largest pension funds in Canada has agreed to acquire more than a third of the shares in the main LNG import terminal in South America, the GNL Quintero facility in Chile.

Borealis Infrastructure, the infrastructure investment manager of the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System (OMERS), signed an accord to buy a 34.6 stake in the terminal.

The Canadian share purchase is in the third main stakeholder in the facility, a holding company called Terminal de Valparaíso, a joint venture between Spanish gas transmission and LNG terminal owner, Enagas Middle East energy group Oman Oil Co. and Empresa Nacional del Petróleo (ENAP), the Chilean state-owned energy company.

The remaining key shareholders after the Borealis Infrastructure purchase from Oman Oil are Enagas and ENAP.

Enagas, which remains in control of the Chilean terminal, said the Canadian share transaction was valued at US$341 million.

As part of the transaction, Borealis has also agreed to grant

Stake sold in Chilean Quintero import terminal and jetty

Enagas a 12-month call option for 5 percent of its shares in the terminal.

The Canadian deal comes as the largest terminal in the region prepares to upgrade its equipment to increase its capacity to 20 million cubic metres per day.

The terminal is located 160 kilometres northwest of the Chilean capital Santiago and was the first land-based LNG regasification facility in the southern hemisphere when it came on line in 2009.

It has three storage tanks with 334,000 cubic metres of capacity, four vaporizers and a four-bay truck-loading station.

GNL Quintero is unique in the region in that it is land-based and expanding, while other South American terminals in nations such as Argentina and Brazil are Floating Storage and Regasification Units chartered from shipping companies.

The Chilean terminal also has the capability to send natural gas volumes to neighbouring Argentina during the southern hemisphere winter months when demand is highest. "GNL Quintero is one of the most relevant terminals in the region, providing critical regasification and storage capacity to central Chile," said Ralph Berg, Executive Vice President & Global Head of Infrastructure for the Ontario pension fund.

"GNLQ is a well-managed, world-class asset that aligns closely with our ongoing effort to diversify our global portfolio of core infrastructure holdings - and pay pensions to our members.

"We look forward to working constructively with our fellow GNLQ shareholders, GNLQ management and all local stakeholders in the years ahead," added Berg.

Enagas also purchased 19.1 percent for the shares Oman Oil had acquired in Terminal of Valparaíso (TDV) holding company.

The convoluted ownership structure now shows ENAP with a 20 percent holding, TDV (100-percent owned by Enagas Chile) 40 percent, OMERS 29.6 percent and Bahia de Quintero SpA Terminal (51.9 percent Enagas Chile and 48.1 percent OMERS) 10.4 percent.

Total settles differences with Algerian state energy firm to help advance LNG on gas production front

Our Europe editor

Sonatrach, Algeria's state energy company, and France's Total have signed a comprehensive agreement and announced "the amicable settlement of outstanding differences" between the two companies as the Algerians seek to end their underperformance in the liquefied natural gas sector and in pipeline gas as well.

"The agreement enables Sonatrach and Total to expand their partnership by progressing new upstream projects," said a statement.

The accord with Total comes less than a month after the Algerian government appointed a new chief executive at Sonatrach.

Joint operations are back on the cards in the upstream

Timimoun project

Renewal of the Total-Sonatrach relationship includes a new contractual framework for the Timimoun natural gas project.

Algerian LNG exports have plummeted in the past year to 11.44 million tonnes from its nameplate capacity of 25.3MT. It is now on a par as an exporter of LNG with Trinidad and its one Atlantic Basin plant in the Caribbean.

Algeria remains a substantial pipeline exporter of natural gas to Europe, though it also has room for much improvement to boost capacity and production with more investment in its ample resources.

France was the largest recipient of Algerian LNG last year when 4.48 million tonnes were delivered as Sonatrach continued to experience feed-gas shortages and underperformance and a shutdown respectively at its two liquefaction plants at Skikda and Arzew.

Behind France came Turkey with 3.09MT of Algerian cargoes and Spain, Europe's biggest importer, was in third place with 2.14MT.

Total itself has no long-term LNG supply agreements with Sonatrach. The importer of Algerian LNG to France is the utility Engie, whose subsidiary owns two terminals near Marseille and another on the French West Coast.

However, Total is a shareholder in the fourth and newest French import terminal at the Channel port of Dunkirk.

The Algerian Timimoun natural gas project mentioned in the agreement is located between the towns of Timimoun and Adrar in the south-western part of Algeria. ■