

RECHARGE

November 30, 2021

'To be to be a leader in this space, you have to think about innovation and scale'

Alana Duerr accepts Next Gen Leadership prize at Ventus Awards.
Photo: BNOW



Simply Blue's director for US projects Alana Duerr talks to Recharge about her career in offshore wind, the future of floating, and what it means to her to win the first-ever Ventus Next-Gen Leadership award.

By **Tim Ferry**

The term 'next-gen' gets used quite freely. What to your mind makes offshore wind energy's emerging leadership distinct?

As the US [offshore] industry has grown, we've pulled experience from Europe, and also from the oil & gas industry, so many of the [current leaders] are seasoned professionals.

Now we're seeing young leaders starting in the industry, growing into the industry, instead of starting at the middle to the end point of their careers. Our careers are growing up with the industry and so we bring a different perspective than those who had careers in other industries.

We may at the end of our careers look back and have only worked in offshore wind. When I think about that, wouldn't it be amazing to have been part of something at the very early stages and then to have grown up in to lead a new industry in the US and globally?

'Leadership and innovation': Ventus Awards cheers ascendant US offshore wind sector

[Read more](#)

Tell us about your background and how you got to your role as head of US project for Simply Blue?



My educational background is in undersea architecture and ocean engineering. I got my PhD in ocean engineering [at Florida Atlantic University] and was actually working on marine hydrokinetic energy when I had the opportunity coming out of grad school to work at the US Department of Energy and to work on offshore wind. I realised that we were closer to something commercial that could actually make an impact on the energy transition sooner than marine hydrokinetics.

At the DOE, I was supporting the offshore wind R&D portfolio. I was there for six years. I went from supporting the portfolio to by the time I left, I was leading the portfolio. I would call it my biggest accomplishment there was starting off the National Offshore Wind R&D Consortium and it was a funding opportunity that I created and then we awarded it to NYSERDA [New York State Energy Research and Development Authority].

Then, I decided to go try something a little different. So, I went from the public sector to private and I worked for DNV for a little over two years, leading up their offshore wind advisory and renewables advisory team in North America. It was a new team, and I enjoyed my time there a lot. I learned a lot about the industry, a lot about business and consulting, and how to lead a team as opposed to leading a technical project.

And then the opportunity to join Simply Blue came about. I got the job offer in May and I started in July.

So I'm relatively new to Simply Blue, but all the previous industry experience is really drew me to the this unique blue economy developer in the offshore wind space who's wholly focused on floating offshore wind.

With my background in naval architecture and ocean engineering, all of it is about floating structures, so floating wind has always held a special place in my heart and something I'm very passionate about. Innovative technology really excites me on a personal level, and as we think about how offshore wind can enable a meaningful energy transition, there's so much opportunity in deep water. Figuring out how to harness that, how to develop commercial projects in deep water, is going to mean so much in offshore wind's contribution to the overall global energy transition.

I like being on that cutting edge from a technology perspective and thinking about what the next frontier is, and so Simply Blue and the partnerships that we've created have allowed me to be deeply involved in that space.

Simply Blue came fresh onto the floating wind scene only a few years ago and already had a huge influence on some of the first projects in the sector in Europe and elsewhere...

I would actually consider Simply Blue to be a "next generation leader" from a company perspective, because we really think about how to tackle these really big challenges and bringing together the right people in the right teams and expertise and resources and putting that all together to tackle these really big challenges.

The floating wind sector is growing very rapidly now, with gigawatts of new project in the pipeline. What do you see as the main opportunities and challenges facing the sector at this point?

US 'well-positioned' to be a leader in global floating wind boom: BOEM chief

[Read more](#)

Unlike fixed bottom offshore wind, there isn't a global hub yet, from a manufacturing and supply chain perspective. For fixed bottom, that hub is in Europe, it's where so many of the projects have been developed, and so a lot of the supply chain has developed there.



In floating, that space is still open. Where is the global hub going to be? It is going to depend on who makes the biggest commitments to floating offshore wind now.

If we in the US decide that we want to be a global leader in floating offshore wind, the moment is right now. We have to be strong, we have to be bold and say we want to be the leaders in floating wind. We want the industry to grow up around us. We may have been a little bit behind on fixed bottom, but we actually have the chance to lead in the floating wind space in the US right now, if we make those investments and provide the road map for investment in floating. And that means is support, a predictable pipeline of projects, and understanding what that means on both the east and the west coast.

The challenge, a lot of it revolves around supply chain and the manufacturing and ports and all of the things that we actually hear about with fixed bottom as well. From an industry perspective, when we see a pipeline of projects like we see on the east coast from a fixed bottom perspective, when we see that pipeline, the investments come. It comes when there's certainty around those projects being installed.

We can do that from a floating perspective, and we can do it earlier and better and potentially be the leader globally. If we can show that there's a predictability in that pipeline of projects, where they're going to be, what the timeline is going to be, then we can match that with the appropriate investment in ports, in the infrastructure, in the in the training of people, to actually construct and operate the projects.

There's a really important moment that we're in right now to potentially be a leader in the global floating wind space.

Where do you see the momentum building most for floating now that the wider US offshore wind sector is finally starting to take shape?

There's a lot of momentum building on the west coast because the [narrow continental shelf] necessitates floating. There isn't shallow-water to develop projects, so it has to be floating. But while the west coast usually gets the spotlight from a floating perspective, I don't want to forget the east coast.

It's important because we see states like New York and Massachusetts that have a lot of [shallower-water] projects that are happening and so a lot of momentum on the fixed bottom side, but we also have some really big targets from an electrification and a decarbonisation perspective that aren't necessarily going to be met by the offshore wind targets that are currently set. So, I would so we see opportunity on both coasts for sure.

What does being a leader in floating wind mean?

To be to be a leader in this space, you have to think about innovation and scale.

Floating wind has really been focused on smaller scale projects to date. I think to be a leader we have to be really focusing on moving beyond the small-scale demonstration types of projects and moving into where we know the technology works and we're ready to deploy on the biggest scales, because it's only through that that big scale that we are going to get to the cost reduction trajectory that fixed-bottom has had to date.

We get to that by deploying at scale really big turbines, big projects, and in locations where the wind speed is really, really incredible. When we go further offshore, we need to take some risks from an innovation perspective.

A lot of focus has been put on innovation from a substructure perspective. We're turning a corner. Not that we found the end-all-be-all substructure that works everywhere. I don't think that's actually going to happen; we're not going to have a Model T [Ford] that is going to work for every single site, we're going to have something that will have archetypes and then depending on the site and depending on what turbine you're using, we're gonna have slight tweaks in the substructures.

TotalEnergies debuts in offshore wind generation through Taiwan stake

[Read more](#)



Then we have to start to think about really moving into serial production; that's going to be hugely important for floating projects and for floating technology.

We know Simply Blue views its developments from a 'platform agnostic' standpoint but how do you approach the question of which substructure concept will work best for a project?

First and foremost, when considering the numerous factors, making sure that the performance of the turbine is maintained, that's job number one. But then you have to think about all of the other things that play into the system dynamics. At what cost and what's going to work at the site? Another factor is constructability from a fabrication perspective. The next step is thinking about local content and creating a local supply chain that we can develop in support of the project.

You may end up at the end of the day choosing a substructure because you're able to do the final fit-up in the port that's local to your project. It's very much a system-view as opposed to simply an engineering question. It's really about making the project work.

As a woman in the industry, where do you see the opportunities are for diversifying the look of the industry?

This is a really interesting question. I think about when I was first in naval architecture and I would go to conferences and they were very much like the makeup of my undergrad class, which was less than 20% women. I feel like I come at [this question] from an almost unfair view because I have only seen increasing diversity from those very early stages in my educational experience. So, I do see and I am exposed to a lot more diversity than what I saw previously, so I think that's one point.

Not to say that the work is done and not to say that there isn't work ahead of us.

But at DNV my boss was a woman, and her boss was a woman. I've been exposed to a lot of really strong female leaders in the offshore wind industry that I've had the chance to work with, or I've had the chance to just see leading in the industry and I think that they have been really champions in promoting women. I feel like I wouldn't be where I am without some of those female leaders that I've been exposed to and continue to work with.

Showcasing female leaders shows that there are women in the industry gives an example that women can be successful in the industry. But there's always room for improvement and I think that's probably the most salient point.

I really tried to do my best to talk to and mentor young people, and especially women. If women reach out to me on *LinkedIn*, I'm always willing to have a half-an-hour chat with them to talk about opportunities in industry and I try my best to help them make connections wherever I can. And I think that it's incumbent upon all of us in positions of leadership to take our time to do that, whether it's from a diversity of gender, diversity of race, or wherever you feel like you can make that biggest impact.

I'm fully invested in this in this industry, and I want it to be a reflection of my values, and one of those values is to see the diversity in the industry which reflects the diversity that we see in the world. I think that's the best way forward and it won't happen organically, and we have to take steps to make it happen. Sometimes those are very easy steps, sometimes much harder steps, but look around to make sure that we're doing what we can where we can.

What does it mean to you to be nominated for – and indeed to win – a Ventus Award?

It's an honour to be to be recognised among such a worthy group of finalists for the 'Next-Gen Leadership' category and then also just among all of the Ventus Award winners.

We didn't know who else had made it into the finals until it was literally up on the on the screen. So that was quite a moment, especially to see that the category actually had five finalists. I think that shows what a deep group of next generation leaders there are in the industry.

The inaugural Ventus Awards were organised by US sector advocacy body the Business Network for Offshore Wind and held, in partnership with Recharge, in Washington earlier this month.