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(Tradewinds)
Joe Brady Stamford

Heidenreich Marine has boosted the capacity of its Houston-based lightering operation with the charter of two aframaxes on two-year and three-year terms, respectively.

Heidmar boss Per Heidenreich confirms the charter of a Sovcomflot newbuilding with delivery in August for a period of two years. He is not commenting on the rate, which is understood to be less than \$19,000 per day. "We had a number of Sovcomflot vessels on charter in the early 1990s - we're glad to be doing business with them again," he said.

Heidenreich also confirms that the 97,000-dwt Chemtrans Lyra (ex-Eagle Lyra, built 1993), which recently failed subjects with US Gulf competitor Skaugen PetroTrans, has also become part of the Heidenreich Lightering Services Inc (HLSI) fleet.

Brokers have reported the three-year fixture at \$18,700 per day.

The build-up gives HLSI about a half-dozen ships, the others on shorter-term charters. This is just about on pace with where HLSI expected to be in its gradual campaign to build up market share against bigger rivals Skaugen and AET Petrolink, he says.

"We're right on schedule," Heidenreich said. "We probably have no more than 15% market share but we've set the foundation to increase it."

Heidenreich says HLSI performed its 100th lightering about a week ago.

"It was a milestone in that I think we've passed the test," Heidenreich said. "We've been vetted and have our approvals from a lot of the majors. I think people realise now that we are not going to go away, even if our competitors wish we would."

Heidenreich finds it a tricky time to build up a chartered-in fleet. "I think we have been in an artificially high market, driven by artificially high oil prices," he said. "We don't see it continuing, but with the uncertainty we see every day in world events, who can be certain?"