

# The Independent Edge

## Driving industry progression for a sustainable future

**Name:** Adrian Hugh Tolson  
**Job title:** Vice President, Sales & Marketing  
**Location:** San Francisco, USA  
**Company:** Chemoil Energy  
**Appointed:** 1994

### Educational and employment background:

Adrian Tolson is Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Chemoil, one of the world's leading independent physical suppliers of marine fuel. Based in San Francisco, he has worked with the company for over 22 years and has held positions as marketing manager and managing director of the subsidiary, Kemoil Limited, until being appointed to his current position in 1994. He received his Bachelor of Commerce degree from Edinburgh University.

During his career with Chemoil, Adrian has been part of leading the company's growth throughout North America and has played a key role in progressing Chemoil's global expansion strategy into the ARA region, Latin America, Asia and the Middle East. Through his direction of all regional sales and marketing activity and by sustaining strong relationships with clients and contacts throughout the industry, Adrian has a deep understanding of the diverse challenges that suppliers and shipping companies face. As such, he has helped Chemoil achieve its control over the supply chain and built Chemoil into an industry leader.

### Vision for company:

My vision of Chemoil is that of a fully integrated supplier of marine fuels in as many ports worldwide as possible, and that Chemoil will apply its supply chain model in more and more locations. From a customer point of view, we need to be both adaptive and responsive to the changing demand and pressures from our customers. We also need to be innovators to create new product offerings or supply locations that increase the range of options open to our customer base.

### Top three issues facing the marine fuels sector:

Firstly, we need to protect the unprecedented industry growth and investment in recent years during boom times, and not let this be undone by the current crisis. Businesses built on low capital are now a thing of the past. It is important not to turn back the clock, even more so for the independents, who have come a long way. Undoubtedly, we will see some market consolidations as the stronger suppliers devour the weaker ones. Nevertheless, the industry made a leap forward in both financial terms and its credibility as a business sector in recent years, and we should drive this forward instead of disappearing into our shells.

The second issue is customer credit. We have already seen the signs and clearly, we will need to be wary of the credit worthiness of many significant customers. Suppliers cannot live in the past and buyers cannot expect credit to be as easy as it was in previous years. Suppliers should act diligently and proactively to ensure that credit risks are minimized, by increasing expertise in these areas. Buyers need to be more responsive to suppliers' needs for credit and financial information; extended credit terms are a thing of the past. There needs to be a much closer relationship between buyer and seller in times that are troubling for both parties. The relationship needs to be developed long term - we can no longer treat each bunker sale as an ad hoc, one-off transaction. A tighter, closer, more honest and open rela-



tionship will not only pay dividends to avert credit problems and risk, but also benefit both parties in other areas of business cooperation.

Last but not least are environmental issues. We might question whether this momentum will continue in harder economic times, but it appears that the timetable set by the IMO will not alter, and that the USA, EPA and CARB will continue their pressures. From my perspective, it seems that suppliers are more prepared for this momentum than buyers, and that buyers are hoping that the economic times will slow down this agenda. I view this as naïve thinking, as our industry is so far behind other transportation industries that we should expect no reprieve or respite!

### Best thing about the bunker industry:

The people - adaptable, innovative, committed, trustworthy and perhaps a little obsessive or compulsive. This industry provides variety like no other; the constant set of changing variables make each day, hour and minute a totally new experience. Even if you think you have worked them out, you are constantly surprised... Hopefully for the better!

### Worst thing about the bunker industry:

The lack of transparency and trust. The industry has raised its profile in recent years and has started to develop a strong core of professionalism. However, we lack standards and barriers to entry, which makes it all too easy for a small minority to enter our business, damage our reputation and perpetuate stereotypes. Our industry continues to be hurt by this and we, by our actions or in-actions, continue to support this. The industry should never discourage new entrants and the innovation they bring, but we should be more discerning on what will really take us forward.

### What do you do when you are not working:

Perhaps trying to find time to sit on the beach in the sun somewhere with no mobile phone reception, or sharing some good wine with friends and reverting back to my first love and first career in the wine industry. ■