

NEW NAME SAME SERVICE

WORDS: NIGEL ADLAM. PHOTOS: GLENN CAMPBELL.

“IT’S AN OLD TERRITORY NAME
AND WE’RE AN OLD TERRITORY
COMPANY, SO IT’S A NICE FIT”

LOYAL STAFF - (FROM LEFT) BEN FLOYD,
MANDY TAYLOR AND JASON MOON



LOADING UP TO SERVICE
THE TERRITORY'S COASTAL
COMMUNITIES



Self-made businessman Ken Conlon is going back to the future.

He is changing the name of his Darwin-based charter shipping company from Sealink Barges to avoid confusion.

Instead of going for something “trendy”, he has chosen a historic Northern Territory name: Barge Express.

That’s the name of an old company run by John Grice – it serviced Indigenous communities for many years before selling out to Perkins.

“It’s an old Territory name and we’re an old Territory company, so it’s a nice fit,” says Mr Conlon.

“Lots of people along the Territory coast know the name and have fond memories of the service it provided.”

Rebranding is under way and Barge Express will be “launched” soon.

Mr Conlon says the company name will change but the high quality of service will stay the same.

He has always believed in keeping the most important person in business – “the person who pays the bills” – happy.

“I was trained in my early years to look after the customers. I took that philosophy with me when I branched out on my own.”

Barge Express has two 47-metre, 500-tonne vessels: *Bima Tujuh* and *Sealink Darwin*.

Bima Tujuh is contracted full-time to Toll and delivers goods to communities from the Tiwi Islands to Ramingining.

A scheduled service for the barge is expected to be announced soon.

Sealink Darwin does charter work across the Top End.

Its most recent contract is to deliver Power and Water Corporation equipment to communities hit by Cyclone Lam.

Hundreds of homes and millions of dollars worth of infrastructure were damaged.

“We’re happy to provide such a vital service at a time when communities are trying to rebuild,” says Mr Conlon.

Sealink Darwin is expected to pick up a lot more work from the Territory and Federal governments.

It also works for major mining companies.

Barge Express has an office in the city centre and a depot at Hudson Creek.

Mr Conlon runs the company with the strong support of his wife Judy and says the firm’s staff are among its greatest strengths.

The two managers, Ben Floyd and Jason Moon, are both former military men.

“They’re terrific assets,” says Mr Conlon. “They bring real discipline to the business, a discipline that can be lacking elsewhere in the industry.

“I can fully trust them.”

Mr Floyd, who was deployed to Iraq, East Timor and Papua New Guinea

during his 16 years in the armed forces, is the shipping manager.

He operated Army barges in war zones and on peace missions.

Mr Moon is the Barge Express engineering manager.

He was a marine engineer for 12 years in the Army and then continued working for Defence for another 12 years as a public servant.

Mr Conlon also paid tribute to his long-serving accounts and administration manager Mandy Taylor for her dedicated work.

“She’s also a great asset for Barge Express,” he says.

Barge Express skippers and crew are regarded as the best in the business.

Mr Conlon has been in the transport industry for more than 40 years.

He started as a truck driver and came to Darwin more than 20 years ago to work for a big transport company, but soon went out on his own by borrowing the money to buy a truck.

Mr Conlon saw a market not being met by the big firms: delivering everyday goods to the Territory’s coastal communities.

Within a decade, he had 12 road trains servicing 32 communities.

He went into shipping at the request of Indigenous community leaders, who wanted a service not interrupted by the Top End’s wet season.

And he hasn’t looked back. **TQ**

Contact: Barge Express
08 8947 4960 or 0417 221 937, or
visit www.bargeexpress.com.au

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BARGE EXPRESS OFFERS AN ALL-YEAR SHIPPING SERVICE