

# Stantec commmits to carbon neutrality

*IWP&DC* speaks with **Mario Finis**, Executive Vice President for Stantec's Energy & Resources business



Above: **Mario Finis is the Executive Vice President for Stantec's Energy & Resources business**

**STANTEC HAS OVER 100** years of hydropower and dams experience going back to the founding of Harza Engineering in 1920. We have completed over 5000 dam projects around the world and helped build over 115GW of hydropower, pumped storage, and other renewable energy generation projects. Stantec has planned, designed and supported construction for some of the world's largest and most complex dam and hydroelectric power projects.

We support our clients in the natural resources and renewable energy industries and help them and communities to navigate the energy transition.

I personally have nearly 40 years of business and engineering experience in water resources, power and renewable energy. Throughout my career I have worked on some of the world's most iconic engineering projects including the Panama Canal Third Set of Locks Expansion Project and the 188m high Tekeze Dam and Hydro Project in Ethiopia.

## **When and why did Stantec make its pledge to become carbon neutral?**

Stantec made our commitment to carbon neutrality by 2022 and net zero by 2030 on 11 February 2021, but this effort has been in the works for well over a year. The pledge is a reflection of our commitment to climate action. We are starting with what we

operationally control but have hopes that our efforts will directly connect to an even greater focus on positive action with our clients and supply chain.

The core of both pledges is to focus first on reducing emissions. We are setting an ambitious science-based emissions reduction target and making some real operational change to achieve those goals.

We consider carbon neutrality the next progression, a light green step. This means we will purchase offsets to address the residual emissions we can't reduce on our own. This consists of purchasing renewable energy certificates (or the country level equivalent) and certified carbon offsets. We have some geographies where we will be moving quicker (UK, Australia, New Zealand, Italy, and the Netherlands) but our global operations will be carbon neutral against 2022 emissions.

The next step is net-zero. Our focus will be additionality replacing purchased offsets with Stantec investments that generate new renewable energy and eliminate or capture carbon. For us, the real impact will come by connecting our efforts to our technical expertise, innovation, and thought leadership. We are closely watching the science based target initiative and their efforts to develop the net-zero standard and will adjust our approaches accordingly to meet their criteria.



Right: **Finis described the Panama Canal as an iconic project and one of the reasons why he became an engineer**



**Why do you think it is important for companies like your own to make such pledges? Is it a case of ‘practising what we preach’?**

All companies, all citizens in the world have a responsibility to address climate change. This is a decision that really resonates with all of our stakeholder groups. Our clients are trying to solve these same challenges. Our employees want to work for a company that makes positive change in the world. Our investors are a key part in driving the change.

We are making this commitment to do our part in protecting communities from the worst impacts of climate change. Our team members apply sustainable best practices to projects around the world daily. By making this pledge we demonstrate that Stantec applies the same passion to address our own impact.

**Please give an insight into how such pledges and the importance of sustainable development are/have been applied to your projects within the water industry?**

Sustainability is really part of Stantec’s identity, it’s in our DNA and touches most of what we do. We look for creative ways to approach a project that improve the environmental and social performance. When working with clients we try to provide the most sustainable solutions to projects whenever possible, but it is difficult for us to directly impact that change

because we are client representatives and, ultimately, it is the client’s decision to make. Not all clients take our suggestions, but we feel good that we are constantly pushing the envelope to do what’s best for our clients and the communities they serve.

Let me give you an example of an iconic project most people recognise. Our team were the lead designers of the Third Set of Locks for the Panama Canal Expansion. We were selected for that work because of our excellent engineering capabilities and our ability to bring the best talent from across the globe. Rather than the traditional approach of a large, single design centre of excellence, we used our technology to build a “virtual” team of experts from six different locations – Panama, Chicago, Rotterdam, Buenos Aires, Milan, and Seattle – who collaborated on the design-build delivery of the project. The time zone differences worked to our advantage – lengthening the workday from a normal 8 or 10 hours to upwards of 16 hours. This was a significant advantage for a schedule-critical project. This solution is the perfect environmental, social and governance project example. It conserves energy, saves time, and reduces the environmental footprint of the team through avoided travel and the use of innovative technology for collaboration.

It’s the combination of corporate commitment and projects like these that contributed to Stantec being named the fifth most sustainable company in the world and first in North America by Corporate Knights. ➡

**Above: Stantec was the lead designer of the Third Set of Locks for the Panama Canal Expansion**

**Below: The Genale Dawa III Hydropower project in Ethiopia**





**❏ Does the success of sustainable development differ country to country if government commitment to sustainability isn't as strong?**

The governments of some countries are moving faster than others. This governmental action really drives the change. We're also now seeing increased interest from investors and other stakeholders, such as funding agencies, pressing for improved ESG and sustainability on projects. Multinational clients, with operations in those geographies moving faster, tend to then apply these concepts in other geographies, but it's sometimes haphazard and, honestly, the change is not fast enough. The hydropower and dams industry is delivering important renewable projects to the communities we serve. Industry-wide sustainable guidelines and best practices would be another positive force in pushing for change. The IHA's Sustainability Protocol can serve as a tool for evaluating the sustainability of hydropower projects and identifying opportunities for improvement. It is essential that we, as an industry, apply the most sustainable practices to all of our projects for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Images below: **Tekeze dam: Finis says that to be a part of such engineering marvels defines a career**



Talking about Stantec's net-zero commitment, we have made it for our entire global operation. We will be implementing these practices in each of our offices. Regarding sustainable development as a whole, those countries that have a governmental and regulatory push are moving much faster than others. The UN Sustainable Development Goals have been helpful in moving forward a consistent framework for addressing climate change. That is a very helpful driver. Increased interest from clients, investors and other stakeholders in meeting ESG goals is also driving improved practices in sustainable development no matter the country.

**Please give examples of how sustainable practices have been incorporated into Stantec's projects.**

As well as the example of the Panama Canal Expansion project, another great recent example is the Genale Dawa III Hydropower project in Ethiopia. In this 254MW scheme Stantec served as employer's representative providing contract management consultancy services for the EPC. We also facilitated the transfer of knowledge and training through observation of field activities, mentoring, coaching and classroom workshops with practitioners. This project is now delivering vital renewable energy for the region and delivers life-long benefits for the employees that received training and skills and have permanent jobs and an improved quality of life.

**How can Stantec create more opportunities for sustainable development in project design and engineering in the future?**

This carbon neutral/net-zero pledge is a reflection of Stantec's commitment to sustainability. It really is a part of our culture and embedded in our core values. I think making this an integral part of the entire Stantec community is an important way to bring this mindset to our projects and meetings with clients.

This pledge is merely the first step in what will be an ongoing initiative. Stantec's Innovation Office will fund employee-driven research and business solutions that will not only serve as a strategic resource in reducing Stantec's carbon emissions, but also those of its clients. We believe we have the unique ability to lead in defining new innovative solutions for the market.

**Can you share some personal insights or reflections of your experiences working on projects?**

The Panama Canal Expansion and the Genale Dawa III are two iconic projects that I will always look back on with pride. To be a part of engineering marvels like these defines a career. They are projects I talk about with our new engineers at Stantec about why what we do matters. Both of those projects are changing the world for the better. The Panama Canal is an essential part of world trade and we designed the project in an environmentally sound way. The Tekeze Dam is delivering needed power to an entire region of Africa, created jobs, and improved the skills of the local workforce. The project improved the quality of life and created benefits for communities well beyond those directly impacted by the project. Those projects are why I became an engineer. ●