

Dutch climate startup FlexBase goes global with Singapore office, international investors

Dutch climate change business FlexBase, backed by OSS Group and US venture capitalist Patri Friedman, among other investors, launches a Singapore office.

SINGAPORE, January 27, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Leading Dutch floating engineer Jan Willem Roël is internationalising his firm, [FlexBase](#), through the launch of an international office to address global markets, in Singapore. The firm will initially focus on the Southeast Asia and subsequently the broader Indo-Asia Pacific (Indo-APAC) region.



Jan Willem Roël in front of the Rotterdam Floating Pavilion during its construction.

Established in 2013 by Roël after a long career with Kingspan Unidek in the Netherlands, Roël pioneered the development of floating structures based on a hybrid polystyrene- concrete model. Called the "FlexBase Concept System", it enables affordable development of very large floating structures (VLFS) at scale while minimising the use of concrete and steel, reducing the carbon footprint of such structures. It is also significantly less expensive and lighter than marine-grade steels.

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Patri Friedman

Roël has partnered with Shiwen Yap, a former business journalist and ex-ambassador of the Seasteading Institute, to establish FlexBase International from Singapore. The Seasteading Institute was established by Patri Friedman, grandson of Nobel laureate Milton Friedman, with financial backing from Peter Thiel, former Paypal co-founder and an

early Facebook investor.

Yap initially approached Friedman through [Pronomos](#) Capital, his charter city investment fund backed by notable tech investors like Peter Thiel and Marc Andreessen. As a VLFS company,

FlexBase International was off-thesis for the fund, but with Friedman's long history of involvement with innovative marine engineering, he was personally excited by the opportunity.

Speaking on his investment, Friedman said, "I am excited about the application of FlexBase's proven VLFS technology to urban and offshore needs in Asia in the near term; and to its long-term potential to ameliorate rising sea levels due to climate change. Real activists build, and the FlexBase team is building the safest and most affordable way to turn water into a foundation for development."



The Rotterdam Floating Pavilion in the Rijnhaven district.

Yap has left his seasteading days and is now focused on implementation of the FlexBase Concept. Key to the business thesis of FlexBase International is the belief that VLFS can address the challenges of rising sea levels, as well as facilitating marine urbanisation in general and the use of water estate. This is one key way coastal cities like Singapore can transcend its physical boundaries, as well as building a foundation for floating real estate as an asset class.

Information from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) notes how sea levels have risen 21–24 centimetres since 1880. 2020 saw global sea levels set a record high – 91.3 mm above 1993 levels. Sea level rise has accelerated, doubling from 1.4 millimetres per year throughout most of the 20th century to 3.6 millimetres per year from 2006–2015. Estimates of global sea level rise range from a conservative 0.3 metres to 2.5 metres in the worst-case scenario by 2100.

With the increase in global temperature likely to exceed 1.5 Celsius by 2100, the city-state of Singapore is particularly vulnerable. It could face a mean sea level rise of up to 1 metre by 2100, with 30% of its main island less than 5 metres above sea level. Netherlands, which could face actual sea level rise as much of 2m or higher by 2121 – land subsidence in large parts of the country exacerbates the challenge – is utilising floating structures on a growing scale to meet these challenges.

The City of Rotterdam, the site of Europe's biggest port and ~90% of which is below sea level, is already exploring the use of VLFS in marine urbanisation.

It hosts the world's largest floating office building – the headquarters of the Global Centre on Adaptation (GCA) - and a floating automated dairy farm that supplies dairy products to local grocery stores. It's also home to the Floating Pavilion since 2010, a solar-powered meeting and

event space in Rotterdams' harbour whose foundation was built by FlexBase.

Roël said, "Singapore excites me so much, the way they have achieved their urbanisation and environmental quality is globally renowned. ASEAN looks to Singapore as a model of development, therefore it made absolute sense for FlexBase to become part of that model for the future". Roël sees massive opportunities in coming years in Southeast Asia and beyond as nations and cities start to grapple with the hazards of rising sea levels. Not everyone can afford to build a six-meter sea wall around the island like Singapore.

"A new hybrid marine urban form is emerging. We did it in the Netherlands, and now we will do it in Asia. In fact, floating houses in the Netherlands used to be low-cost and perceived as low class. But now? These are seen as highly desirable assets. Floating and living with water is now generally accepted in Holland. I was involved in drafting the building codes for building structures on water and hope to help Singapore do the same," Roël adds.

Roël & Yap have been laid the groundwork for their venture through various commentaries in business media, alongside other thought leaders in the space. Currently, the firm is running a private placement, raising capital from investors in both Singapore and the US. To date, investors include Friedman, who is syndicating the deal through AngelList, an angel investment platform for accredited investors; family-owned Oilfield Services & Supplies ([OSS Group](#)), a Singapore-based oil & gas firm seeking to diversify business lines; and a family investment vehicle in the city-state. Other conversations are ongoing.

Commenting on their involvement with FlexBase, Kenneth Loh, Business Development Manager of OSS Group, said: "We are actively looking to partner with solution providers which are focused on strong future themes such as climate change adaptability and environmental sustainability. The Company believes that FlexBase can leverage its technical expertise and experience in prior projects to establish successful operating models in Asia".

Roël plans to further establish FlexBase International in Singapore and the wider region through collaborations with local stakeholders. He has already established a partnership with a Singapore-based shipyard and intends to relocate to Singapore in February 2022. He welcomes opportunities to meet with the different communities of developers, architects and engineers who can envisage the future.

Shiwen Yap
FlexBase International
shiwen@flexbaseintl.com

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