



Ms Grace Chia, co-founder and chief executive of maritime tech start-up BeeX, which won the fourth Smart Port Challenge yesterday. The firm, which took the \$10,000 cash prize, creates autonomous underwater robots that can inspect piers and vessels. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

Underwater robots may soon inspect floating solar farms, says tech firm

An autonomous underwater robot used to inspect piers and vessels in the maritime sector may soon be diving to survey infrastructure at floating solar farms here.

That is one area in which Ms Grace Chia, 29, and her team from maritime tech start-up BeeX, believe their robots can be useful.

BeeX, which was started in October 2018, yesterday won the fourth Smart Port Challenge, organised by Port Innovation Ecosystem Reimagined @ BLOCK71, a collaboration between the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore and NUS Enterprise.

A total of 187 pitches were received from start-ups around the

world, from which 16 were selected for a six-week programme to further pursue their proposals.

A final eight were selected to pitch their ideas to a panel of judges at the Shaw Foundation Alumni House auditorium yesterday, and BeeX took the \$10,000 cash prize.

Ms Chia, who is the chief executive and co-founder, said that using autonomous robots for underwater operations can be cheaper than using traditional manned vehicles, and also more efficient and safer than using divers.

Each robot can be programmed to do specific tasks, and is then left to complete the operation while being remotely monitored.

BeeX is also looking at deploy-

ing the robots to help in the pursuit of cleaner energy here.

Floating solar farms, like the one being built in Tengeh Reservoir, also require regular large-scale inspections, which the BeeX robots are suitable for, said Ms Chia.

BeeX used to survey offshore oil and gas rigs, before pivoting towards operations closer to shore.

Ms Chia said the current field is more cost sensitive, and the team had to relook its pricing strategy.

“The difference between energy and maritime is that energy has very few customers and they’re all very big, but maritime has a lot of customers and they are very diverse,” she said.

Fabian Koh