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Consents given under the Petroleum Act 1998 and Reviews under the Assessment of Environmental Effects Regulations 1999

BP

BLOCK 204/18

Pursuant to Regulation 5(8) of the above Regulations, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry gives notice that, being content that the requirements of the above Regulations have been satisfied, he has, pursuant to Licence P1023, granted a consent to BP Exploration Operating Company Limited to the getting of petroleum and the drilling of an exploration well in Block 204/18 (hereafter referred to as "the project") subject to BP Exploration Operating Company Limited conducting operations in respect of the project in accordance with the relevant environmental statement. The consent for the well was given on 28/08/01.

Background

BP proposes drilling a single, vertical exploration well on the Assynt prospect in block 204/18 some 150 km west of Shetland in a water depth of 956 metres. Drilling operations will involve the use of water-based mud.

The drillship *West Navion* has been selected to drill the Assynt well. The *West Navion* is an ultra deep water dynamically positioned drilling and completion vessel designed to operate in water depths up to 2500m. The ES includes a good overview of options considered, environmental sensitivities and the methods employed in assessing potential impacts.

Environmental Sensitivities and Impacts

During the EIA process, BP considered that the potential environmental impacts with most aspects of drilling the well were negligible but identified interactions for more detailed consideration, including:

- o effects of all activities, including drilling cuttings disposal, on seabed habitats;
 - o noise and possible disturbance to marine mammals;
- o interaction with other users, notably fisheries and marine transport;
 - o possible oil spills.

Potential cumulative and transboundary impacts were also considered, as negligible. Any physical impact on the seabed and associated fauna would be negligible and very localised, with rapid recovery anticipated after the rig departure. The ES described atmospheric emissions from the drillship and those from any potential well test. No significant impact was identified.

The environmental statement describes the occurrence of marine mammals in the area, and how they might be affected by noise from drilling operations. The review in the environmental statement is proportionate to the potential impact of the operation with no significant impact identified. It identifies the worse case spill scenario as a well blow-out, which cannot be contained. There have been no such incidents during drilling activity anywhere on the UKCS to date. Adequate mitigation will be in place to minimise the risk of a spill. FRS and JNCC were consulted on the environmental statement and had no objections. JNCC responded that they considered that it is unlikely that the proposed well will have a significant impact on the conservation value of the marine environment. The environmental statement was well presented and contained an adequate non-technical summary with BP being required to clarify some minor points of detail.

Recommendation

Overall the environmental statement is satisfactory and adequately assesses the potential environmental impacts of the proposed development. Recommend that consent be given.