

**BP Exploration Operating Company Limited (BP)
North Uist Exploration Well
Environmental Statement Summary**

Title:	North Uist Exploration Well
Operator:	BP Exploration Operating Company Limited (BP)
Consultants:	Genesis Oil and Gas Consultants Ltd.
Report No:	W/4123/2011
Submission Date:	August 2011
Quad/Block No:	213/25c
Project Type:	Exploration Well
Reviewer:	Sarah Dacre
Date:	20 th December 2011

Project Description

The project involves the drilling and subsequent abandonment of an exploration well at the North Uist prospect, in Block 213/25c. The location is approximately 125 kilometres (km) north west of the Shetland Islands and 30 km south east of the UK-Faroes median line, in a water depth of 1,291m.

The proposed well will be drilled using the Stena Carron, a dynamically positioned drillship, with an earliest commencement date of late January 2012 and operations expected to last between 3 and 11 months dependent on whether or not the well is successful. The well will be drilled in seven sections using Water Based Mud (WBM), with cuttings discharged at the seabed or at sea surface.

A Vertical Seismic Profile (VSP) will be undertaken during the operations. If hydrocarbons are present, sidetracks may be drilled to further evaluate the prospect. There is currently no intention to flow or suspend the well for future use. At the end of the drilling operations, it is therefore intended that the well be sealed with cement plugs and the wellhead severed.

Key Environmental Sensitivities

The EIA identified the following environmental sensitivities:

- **Fish Stocks:** No spawning or nursery grounds have been identified in the vicinity of the well location.
- **Seabirds:** Overall seabird vulnerability for the year is low. It is considered to be low during the winter months, moderate between March and August and in October; and high in February and September.
- **Annex I Habitats:** No Annex I habitats have been identified in the vicinity of the proposed well.
- **Annex II Species:** A number of marine mammal species have been recorded in the area of the proposed well, including harbour porpoise, bottlenose dolphin and grey seals.
- **Other Users of the Sea:** The proposed drilling location is in an area of very low fishing activity. Shipping traffic is also low, and typically comprises vessels en route to and from Sullom Voe Terminal and vessels in transit across the Atlantic.

Key Potential Environmental Impacts

The EIA identified the following potential impacts and related mitigation:

- **Physical interference:** Appropriate mitigation measures will be put in place to ensure that other users of the sea are aware of the proposed activities, e.g. 500m exclusion zone around the drillship, the use of standby vessels, and the issue of Kingfisher Bulletins and Notices to Mariners. Due to the low fishing and shipping activity in the area, the impact of the drilling operations is considered to be insignificant.
- **Noise:** A number of noise sources will be associated with the proposed operations, including noise from drilling, the drill ship and stand by vessels, helicopter flights, the VSP and the possible use of explosives during well abandonment. These have the potential to impact on marine mammals in close proximity to the proposed operations. BP will therefore implement measures to mitigate the impacts, including application of the JNCC guidelines when undertaking the VSP and using explosives. Providing the mitigation procedures are followed the risk to marine mammals is considered to be low.
- **Marine discharges:** All the chemicals selected by BP are chosen on the basis of technical compatibility and environmental performance. All sections of the well will be drilled using Water Based Mud (WBM). Approximately 1,502 tonnes of cuttings will be generated, with 835 tonnes discharged directly at the seabed and 667 tonnes recovered to the rig and discharged at the sea surface. The marine environment is sufficiently dynamic to facilitate rapid dispersion of chemicals and drill cuttings and the potential impacts of the marine discharges are considered to be insignificant.
- **Seabed disturbance:** The drilling of the well will have a direct impact on the benthic communities in the vicinity of the well location. However, the species composition and habitat is typical of the area, and only a very small proportion will be impacted by the operations. In addition, the operations are of short duration, and the benthic communities and habitats are expected to recover within a fairly short period of time.
- **Coastal Sensitivities:** The ES identified that there are significant sensitivities around the northwest coastline of the Shetland Islands, with numerous conservation sites.. Whilst these coastal sensitivities would not be affected by the drilling operation, it is recognised that they could potentially be impacted by a significant oil spill. However, suitable mitigation measures will be in place to prevent such a spill, and to respond to any accidental event to minimise the potential environmental impact.
- **Atmospheric emissions:** The main source of atmospheric emissions during the drilling operations will be fuel use on the vessels and drillship. Considering the highly dispersive environment and short duration of the operations, the impacts are considered to be insignificant.
- **Accidental events:** A number of preventative control measures will be in place to minimise the risk of accidental events, including an Operations Management System and the development of an Oil Pollution Emergency Plan (OPEP). Modelling of a blow-out has been undertaken and included in the EIA, and proposed response measures include a capping device, stand-by vessels equipped with dispersant, and additional skimmers and dispersant supplies on the Shetland Islands.
- **Cumulative impacts:** No significant cumulative impacts are expected.
- **Transboundary Impacts:** No transboundary impacts are likely as a result of this project.

Consultation

Comments were received from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), Marine Scotland (MS), the Northern Lighthouse Board (NLB), the Maritime Coastguard Agency (MCA)

and the Ministry of Defence (MOD).

JNCC: JNCC confirmed they are content for the ES to be accepted.

Marine Scotland: Marine Scotland confirmed that they are content for the ES to be accepted.

MCA: MCA confirmed that they had no objections.

MoD: MoD confirmed that they had no objections.

NLB: NLB confirmed that the standard marking requirements for the drilling vessel should apply. (A more detailed assessment of the requirements would be provided in response to the Energy Act Part 4A application for the consent to locate the drillship).

Public Notice: Public notice of the ES elicited representations from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and Friends of the Earth Scotland (FoE). The Department issued responses to the RSPB and Friends of the Earth on 15 December and 20 December 2011 respectively. There were no sustainable environmental objections to the proposed drilling operations, but FoE objected to the principle of all deepwater drilling in the light of the *Deepwater Horizon* incident in the Gulf of Mexico..

Additional Information

Additional information was requested to address points by consultees and DECC. BP provided the requested information on the 15 December 2011. All the issues raised were satisfactorily addressed.

Conclusion

On the basis of the information presented within the ES and the additional information proved by BP, and the advice received from consultees, DECC OED is content that there are no environmental or navigational objections to approval of the ES.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the ES should be approved.

Approved

Wendy J Kennedy

Date 20 December 2011.....

Wendy Kennedy

Director DECC Offshore Environment and Decommissioning