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

Burlington Resources Ltd

Darwen East Appraisal Well 110/8a

Background

The proposed Darwen East Appraisal Well is situated in Block 110/8c-F in the Liverpool Bay area of the East Irish Sea approximately 31 kilometres from the Lancashire coast and 115 kilometres from the UK-Ireland trans-boundary line. The well is being drilled to determine the potential size of the Darwen gas reservoir for effective development.

Drilling is scheduled to commence early September. It is expected that drilling will be completed over 38 days. A shallow, single well will be drilled with Water Based Mud, using a slim hole design to reduce the amounts of cuttings (approximately 473 tonnes) and chemicals discharged to the marine environment. The use of Low Toxicity Oil Based Mud is not planned or anticipated. A well test is not anticipated unless low porosity gas is encountered. When drilling operations are completed the well will be plugged and abandoned and the seabed left clear. No explosives would be used in the abandonment of the well. Future development will be the subject of further assessment.

The Liverpool Bay area has been identified as a potential Special Protection Area (pSPA) primarily for the protection and conservation of black scoters and red-throated divers. No draft site boundary has been published and conservation objectives for the pSPA have yet to be fully defined. However, it has been agreed that efforts should be made to maintain in a favourable condition the bird populations in the area. There are a further 21 sites under some form of protection that fall within a 40 Km radius of the proposed well location along the English and North Welsh coastlines.

The EIA identified the following impacts which were considered potentially significant:-

The physical presence of the rig and support vessel.

Supply boat routes through the Liverpool Bay area

Drilling discharges

Hydrocarbon spills

The ES considered these points in detail and elaborated on minimisation strategies, including shallow drilling to a slim hole design reducing cuttings discharges and the use of WBM reducing the likelihood of hydrocarbon spills. The ES emphasised the short drilling period of 38 days, minimising the physical impact of the rig. Burlington also proposed to ensure that supply boat routes were directed to maintain a minimum 2 Km clearance zone from the main bird populations to minimise disturbance. We are satisfied that the ES, supported by additional information, addresses the impacts from the proposed development and overall no significant environmental impacts have been identified.

Recommendation

Overall the environmental statement is satisfactory and adequately assesses the potential environmental impacts of the proposed development. It is recommended that consent is given to the project.

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