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

Shell

Ben Nevis Exploration Well

Shell submitted an environmental statement for the drilling of the Ben Nevis exploration well on 2 April 2003. The well is located in block 219/21 in the northern North Sea, some 210 kilometres north-northeast of Shetland. This will be the second most northerly well ever drilled in the UKCS.

The project comprises the drilling of a single vertical exploration well to a depth of about 3,000m below the seabed. The well will take approximately 55 days to complete. The location has high seabird vulnerability to sea surface pollutants during August and September and the area may be used by a number of species of cetacean.

The well will be drilled with a WBM, but an OBM may be used in the lowest well sections. If OBM is used the cuttings will be shipped to shore for treatment and disposal. There will be no flaring relating to well testing arising from the well. Once the well is completed it will be plugged and abandoned below the level of the seabed. An assessment of the potentially significant effects addressed in the Environmental Statement included noise from anchoring operations and drilling activities along with associated vessels may impact upon cetaceans. Water-based mud discharges and hydrocarbon Spills; oil spill dispersion modelling was undertaken.

Mitigation measures are in place to ensure that impacts are kept to a minimum and details of the Shell Expro management systems were presented.

The Environmental Statement concluded that any residual impacts were mainly of negligible significance. The Environmental Statement does not identify, nor are we aware of any habitats or concentrations of species that could be considered as candidate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and therefore consider that the proposed activity would not affect any possible future SAC.

The Environmental Statement was given approval on 29 May 2003.

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