

**Manuel Exploration Well
ES Web Comments**

ES Title:	Manuel Development
Operator:	Ithaca Energy UK Ltd
ES Report No:	W/3483/2006
ES Date:	January 2007
Block Nos:	11/29
Development Type:	Exploration Well

Synopsis

Ithaca Energy (UK) Ltd. (Ithaca) have applied to drill an **exploration well** in block **11/29** into the Manuel Prospect in order to prove the existence or absence of reservoir quality rocks, hydrocarbons and to provide information on reservoir properties. The well is located in the Moray Firth, approximately **16Km east of Berridale**, off the East Caithness coast, with the nearest international boundary being the **UK/Norwegian Median Line** some **287 Km** distance. The proposed well is situated to the south west of the Beatrice field and 16.5KM south west of the Beatrice demonstrator wind farm, in **water depths** of approximately **45m**.

The well will be drilled using a **jack up rig**, using water based mud (**WBM**) for all sections. A slim hole design has been chosen for the well with a 36" section, 17.5" section and a 12.25" section which will result in **338 tonnes of cuttings** discharged to sea. The works are programmed to commence in **May 2007** and last for approximately **22 days**.

Seabird vulnerability to surface pollution in block 11/29 and the surrounding area is very high throughout the year which is reflected in the designation of a number of Special Protection Areas (SPA's) for breeding seabirds and seabird assemblages. The East Caithness cliffs which are designated as an **SPA** are situated approximately **16Km from the well site**.

The proposed drilling period coincides with the spawning periods of lemon sole (April-September) and nephrops (January-December).

The Moray Firth is important for bottlenose dolphin, harbour porpoise and to a lesser extent white beaked dolphin and minke whale. Risso's dolphin has also been recorded. The Moray Firth is home to a resident population of bottlenose dolphins and the shores support breeding and haul out sites for grey and common seals.

The well will be evaluated by logging and coring, not by undertaking a well test, so there will be no flaring of hydrocarbons. The drilling of the well will result approximately **2,188 tonnes of CO₂** being emitted. The well will be abandoned following evaluation.

A number of environmental interactions were identified as being of potential significance and were considered further:-

- Atmospheric emissions
- Physical presence & disturbance
- Drilling
- Noise
- Accidental events

Habitats/Environmental Sensitivities:- The Moray firth and surrounding coastline is of year round importance for birds and there are a number of coastal and marine SAC's, SPA's and Ramsar sites in the vicinity of the Moray Firth Area. The **Moray Firth marine SAC** is located approximately **12Km** from the well location. Sites and species of known or potential conservation importance were considered as receptors in the process of assessing potential effects of the proposed appraisal well. This assessment identified hydrocarbon spillage as the only mechanism identified with the potential for significant environmental effects. However taking account of the probabilities and mitigation, it is concluded that significant effects on the integrity of these sites are not expected.

Consultees:

JNCC & SNH: - A joint response was provided by JNCC & SNH. They commented that on the basis of the information provided it was unlikely that the well would have a significant environmental impact on the nature conservation of the marine environment.

JNCC & SNH also drew DTI's attention to the fact that RSPB had raised a number of concerns following consultation during the scoping stage, to both SNH & JNCC. The RSPB have suggested that the competent authority undertake an appropriate assessment as the foraging range of the qualifying interests of the two landward Special Protection Areas (SPA) are situated within the proposed drilling area. JNCC & SNH agree that the foraging ranges of birds breeding at these SPA's include the area of drilling, however due to the nature of the proposed activity and the mitigation measures in place, they consider the potential likely effects upon seabirds are very low and consequently consider there will be no added benefit in undertaking an appropriate assessment for the SPA's.

FRS: - FRS have no objections to the work programme proceeding as planned provided all efforts are made to minimise impacts. FRS also commented that every effort should be made to reduce the potential interactions with other legitimate users of the sea.

SEPA: - Welcomed the opportunity to comment on the ES and was satisfied with the content of the ES.

Highland Council:- Nil return

Public Consultation: - Comments were received via email from the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCCS) as a result of the 28 day consultation period, mostly reflecting issues already raised during the earlier Basil Appraisal Well ES. Further information was requested from the operator and having considered their response and the advice of JNCC, we are content that these issues have been addressed.

Recommendation

Based on the information presented in the environmental statement and further information provided, it is recommended that project consent be given.