South Uist Exploration Well 214/21a
ES Web Comments

ES Title:	South Uist Exploration Well 214/21a
Operator:	Shell (UK) Ltd
ES Report No:	W/3762/2007
ES Date:	October 2007
Block Nos:	214/21a
Development Type:	Exploration Well

Synopsis:
Shell (UK) ltd has applied to drill an exploration well in Block 214/21a, into the South Uist prospect, in order to prove the existence or absence of hydrocarbons and to provide information on reservoir properties. The well is located 96 km north-west of Shetland in the Faroe-Shetland Channel. The nearest international boundary is the UK/Faroes Median Line (approximately 46 km). The proposed well is situated in water depths of 1,152 m.

The well will be drilled using the Leiv Eriksson, a dynamically positioned rig, using water based mud (WBM) throughout. This will generate approximately 738 tonnes of cuttings that will be discharged to sea. The well will be evaluated by logging and coring but no well test is planned. The well is to be drilled using conventional techniques over a period of *c.*60 days. The drilling of the well will result in the emission of approximately 9,555 tonnes of CO_2 (including vessel and helicopter support). The well will be abandoned following evaluation. The works are programmed to commence in December 2007.

Habitats and Species/Environmental Sensitivities

Seabird vulnerability in Block 214/21 and the surrounding area is moderate throughout most of the year, with low sensitivity in March and April.

A number of commercially important fish species spawn and/or have nursery grounds in the area; Norway pout, mackerel and blue whiting.

The area holds a relatively high diversity of marine mammals particularly between May and October. Species known to occur include; Fin, Sei, humpback, sperm, minke, northern bottlenose pilot and killer whales. Relatively high numbers of white-sided dolphins have been recorded as have white-beaked dolphins. Common and Risso's dolphin and harbour porpoise have also all been recorded in block 214. During the proposed drilling period pilot whale and white-sided dolphin occur in relatively high numbers, with all other species occurring in the area outwith the drilling period.

A number of environmental issues were identified as being of potential significance and were assessed in the ES, including:

- Noise arising from drilling activity
- Atmospheric emissions from drilling rig and support vessels
- Drilling Discharges
- Accidental spillage of hydrocarbons

The assessment identified noise from drilling activity to be the main issue with the potential to result in significant environmental effects. However, the assessment identified that with the water depth being in excess of 1,000 m noise arising from the drilling rig would attenuate rapidly within the water column and would therefore be localised. It was concluded that there were unlikely to be any significant adverse effects.

Consultees:

JNCC A response from JNCC requested further information on the biological surveys previously undertaken at nearby locations and identified discrepancies within the ES relating to the marine mammals and noise impacts. Following further information provided by the applicant the JNCC considered on the basis of the information provided, they consider it unlikely that the well would have a significant environmental impact on the nature conservation of the local marine environment.

FRS Overall FRS was content that the ES could be accepted.

Recommendation:

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