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

Dolphin Exploration Well

Century Exploration UK Ltd is planning to drill a single exploration well in Block 19/2-b in the Central North Sea, off the East coast of Scotland, approximately 24km to the northeast of the nearest landfall at Fraserburgh.

The anticipated hydrocarbon is oil, with a low possibility of a commercial gas discovery. If commercial quantities of hydrocarbon are discovered, the well will be suspended, otherwise the well will be permanently plugged and abandoned and the seabed left clear of any obstructions. In case of a discovery, Century may test the well at the completion of the drilling period. In addition, there is a 10% or less probability that a VSP survey may be carried out downhole.

Data on epifaunal communities was obtained from seabed photography and grab sampling collected during the baseline environmental survey at the 19/2-B proposed well location in June 2008. The faunal density of the sampling locations was generally low. Preliminary site survey results confirmed that there was no evidence of Annex I Habitats within the surveyed area and in particular at the drilling site, although the final survey report is yet to be received. The full site survey results will be included within the relevant PON15B submission.

The semi-submersible rig, the Byford Dolphin, will be secured onto location by eight anchors at a distance of 800 - 1000m from the rig. Anchor locations will be optimised following analysis of the geophysical survey, completed prior to the rig moving onto location. Water Based Mud (WBM) and possibly Low Toxicity Oil Based Mud (LTOBM) will be used. The discharge of WBM and associated cuttings have been modelled and the area of potential impact identified. The discharge of WBM will have a localised impact on the benthic communities present. However, habitat recovery is likely to be relatively rapid via dispersion, dilution and breakdown of chemicals. Evidence from previous wells drilled using WBM

has demonstrated that the impacts are relatively short lived.

Sensitivities

As a result of an environmental risk assessment there were the following potentially significant aspects identified and addressed within the ES:

- Physical Presence
- Seabed Disturbance
- Noise & Vibration
- Atmospheric Emissions
- Marine Discharges
- Solid Waste
- Potential spills

Mitigation measures are in place to ensure that impacts are kept to a minimum.

Conclusion

An environmental statement was submitted to cover the proposed field development, which considered the potential implications of the development. Following consultation with the statutory consultees, we are satisfied that this project is unlikely to have a significant impact on the receiving environment, including any habitats and species protected under relevant conservation legislation. Due to the coastal SPAs and SACs identified in the ES, SNH requested an Appropriate Assessment (AA) to be undertaken. As the work is to be carried out outwith the breeding season, BERR has agreed to undertake a screening exercise for an AA should the operator wish to undertake further work during the breeding season.

Recommendation

Based on the information present in the ES and further information received, it was advised that project consent be given on 7th August 2008.