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

BHP

BLOCK 97/24

Pursuant to Regulation 5(8) of the above Regulations, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry gives notice that, being content that the requirements of the above Regulations have been satisfied, he has, pursuant to Licence P937, granted a consent to BHP Petroleum Limited to the getting of petroleum and the drilling of an exploration well in Block 97/24 (hereafter referred to as "the project") subject to BHP Petroleum Limited conducting operations in respect of the project in accordance with the relevant environmental statement. The consent for the well was given on 08/08/01.

Background

BHP Petroleum Limited proposes drilling a single, vertical exploration well in block 97/24 in the English Channel, in a water depth of 57 metres some 35 km to the S-SE of Portland Bill. Drilling operations will involve the use of water-based mud.

Environmental Sensitivities and Impacts

The environmental statement includes a good overview of the methods employed in assessing potential impacts, including the establishment/definition of criteria for determining significance of potential impacts.

Impact assessment criteria were considered under three categories:

- Magnitude of predicted environmental change
- Public perception and concerns
- Legislation/policy

Considerable effort was devoted to consultation, as outlined in Appendix F of the ES.

During the EIA process, BHP Petroleum considered that the potential environmental impacts with most aspects of drilling the well were negligible but identified interactions for more detailed consideration, including:

- Effects of all activities, including drilling cuttings disposal, on sensitive seabed habitats;
- Noise and possible disturbance to marine mammals;
- Interaction with other users, notably fisheries and marine transport;
- Possible oil spills.

Potential cumulative and transboundary impacts were also considered, as negligible.

The environmental statement was well presented and contained an adequate non-technical summary. However, it does make considerable use of reports not always accessible for public consultation, and in the case of oil spill studies makes no reference to sources of historical spill risk data.

No significant impacts have been identified from the proposed development and it is unlikely to affect any potential future SAC that may be identified. There were no major objections to this project and no significant impacts were identified. Following the provision of additional information, the Environmental Statement was approved.

Recommendation

Overall the environmental statement is satisfactory and adequately assesses the potential environmental impacts of the proposed development. Recommend that consent be given.

