

Exploration Well 213/25-A ES Web Comments

ES Title:	Exploration Well 213/25-A
Operator:	Conoco
ES Report No:	W/248/1998
ES Date:	October 1998
Block Nos:	213/25-A

Background:

Conoco Limited plan to drill a well 111 km of the North West coast of the Shetlands, in 3685 ft of seawater to a depth of 14,100 ft, using a semi-submersible drilling rig capable of drilling in water depths of over 1000 m. The final choice of drilling contractor had not been made at the time of ES production. Routine drilling operations are not expected to pose any risks to the viability of individual species or habitats, or to the socio-economic activities in the immediate area of the well. The assessment establishes there is sufficient information to evaluate the environmental consequences of the project and that there are sufficient mitigation measures in place for both routine and non routine operations. A wide variety of interested parties have been consulted.

Drilling:

The top two sections (36" and 26") are to be drilled riserless and the cuttings returned to the seabed. The remaining three sections (17½", 12¼" and 8½") will be drilled with WBM, the cuttings returned to the rig for mud recovery, cleaning and discharge at sea level. The total estimated weight of cuttings discharged is about 1597 tonnes. If hydrocarbons are encountered in the reservoir, the cuttings will be collected and returned to shore.

Well Testing:

The well will only be tested if a commercial hydrocarbon bearing formation is discovered. It is stated that it is likely only one test would be required, but no more than three are anticipated, over a period of up to three days. The maximum volumes of hydrocarbons that would be flared are 3,000 bbls of oil and 6,000 mscf of gas. Clean burner technology will be used; flow rates restricted to the minimum necessary and the use of Cleanup fluids minimised and contained on the rig. The quantities of emissions are not seen as environmentally significant in terms of either environmental load or concentration released to the environment.

Suspension and abandonment:

If testing is successful, the well will be plugged and suspended at the end of drilling/testing operations, with about 2 m of wellhead protruding above seabed. Fishermen have been consulted and the position marked on charts.

If no significant hydrocarbons are discovered, the well will be abandoned. It will be sealed with cement plugs, following UKOOA guidelines, and the drill stem cut a few metres below the seabed, leaving no residual seabed hazard.

Environmental Sensitivities:

A detailed description of environmental impacts is given for routine and non-routine operations. For each activity, the range of possible or actual environmental effects, legislative requirements, scale and duration of effect and planned mitigation measures are considered in detail.

The risk of an oil slick and associated damage to cetaceans, wildlife and coasts has been evaluated assuming a worst case scenario. A slick could reach the nearest coast on Shetland in 35 hours with an onshore wind. Mitigation measures include a Blow-Out Preventer, OSCP, Emergency Response Plan, Operational and Emergency Procedures, membership of Oil Spill Response Ltd and OPOL.

Consultees:

FRS is happy that the operation will have no significant impacts on the marine environment. Wide consultation was also carried out with a variety of interested parties. JNCC, while not objecting, request that Conoco adopt suitable measures if flaring has to be carried out in September, a period of very high seabird vulnerability.

Recommendation:

Based on the information presented within the ES it is recommended that approval should be given.