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Offshore Petroleum Regulator  
for Environment & Decommissioning

ITHACA OIL AND GAS LIMITED  
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Registered No.: 01546623

Date: 2nd July 2021

Department for Business, Energy  
& Industrial Strategy

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AB10 1BJ

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[www.gov.uk/beis](http://www.gov.uk/beis)  
[bst@beis.gov.uk](mailto:bst@beis.gov.uk)

Dear Sir / Madam

**THE OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION, PRODUCTION, UNLOADING  
AND STORAGE (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) REGULATIONS  
2020**

**Fotla, WilPhoenix, WilPhoenix DRILLING EXPLORATION WELL 22/01b-  
22/1b-FEX planned well**

A screening direction for the project detailed in your application, reference DR/2107/0 (Version 4), dated 18th June 2021 has been issued under regulation 6 of the above Regulations. The screening direction notice, and any relevant conditions and comments are attached. A copy of this screening direction will be forwarded to the application consultees, the Oil and Gas Authority and published on the gov.uk website.

If you have any queries in relation to this screening direction or the attachments, please do not hesitate to contact [REDACTED] on [REDACTED] or email the Environmental Management Team at [bst@beis.gov.uk](mailto:bst@beis.gov.uk).

Yours faithfully



**THE OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION, PRODUCTION, UNLOADING  
AND STORAGE (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) REGULATIONS  
2020**

**SCREENING DIRECTION CONFIRMING THAT AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT  
ASSESSMENT IS NOT REQUIRED**

**Fotla, WilPhoenix, WilPhoenix DRILLING EXPLORATION WELL 22/01b-  
22/1b-FEX planned well**

**DR/2107/0 (Version 4)**

Whereas ITHACA OIL AND GAS LIMITED has made an application dated 18th June 2021, under The Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration, Production, Unloading and Storage (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2020, and whereas the Secretary of State has considered the application and is satisfied that the project is not likely to have a significant effect on the environment; in exercise of the powers available under regulation 6, the Secretary of State hereby directs that the application for consent in respect of the project need not be accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment, provided that the project is carried out as described in the application for the screening direction and in accordance with the conditions specified in the attached schedule.

In giving a screening direction under regulation 6 of the above Regulations, the Secretary of State accordingly gives his agreement to the Oil and Gas Authority to the grant of consent for the project as detailed in the application.

Effective Date: 2nd July 2021



## **THE OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION, PRODUCTION, UNLOADING AND STORAGE (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) REGULATIONS 2020**

### **SCHEDULE OF SCREENING DIRECTION CONDITIONS**

The grant of this screening direction is conditional upon the screening direction holder complying with the following conditions.

#### **1 Screening direction validity**

The screening direction shall be valid from 2 July 2021 until 30 November 2021.

#### **2 Commencement and completion of the project**

The holder of the screening direction must notify the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (hereinafter called the 'Department') of commencement and completion of the project within two days:

- a) of commencement of the project and
- b) of completion of the project.

Notification should be sent by email to the Environmental Management Team Mailbox: [bst@beis.gov.uk](mailto:bst@beis.gov.uk)

#### **3 Prevention of pollution**

The holder of the screening direction must ensure that appropriate measures are taken to minimise discharges, emissions and waste, in particular through the appropriate use of technology; and to ensure that necessary measures are taken to prevent incidents affecting the environment or, where they occur, to limit their consequences in relation to the environment.

#### **4 Inspections**

Should the Department consider it necessary or expedient for an inspector appointed by the Secretary of State to investigate whether the conditions of the screening direction are being complied with, the holder of the screening direction shall afford the inspector with such facilities and assistance as the inspector considers necessary to exercise the powers conferred by the regulations. The holder of the screening direction shall additionally ensure that copies (electronic or paper) of the screening direction and any other relevant documents are available for inspection by the inspector at:

- a) the premises of the holder of the screening direction; and
- b) the facilities undertaking the project covered by the screening direction.



## **5 Check monitoring**

Should the Department consider it necessary or expedient to undertake an independent monitoring programme to assess the impact of the project covered by the screening direction, the screening direction holder shall afford the Department with such facilities and assistance as the Department considers necessary to undertake the work.

## **6 Atmospheric emissions returns**

Following completion of the project covered by the screening direction, the holder of the screening direction shall report all relevant atmospheric emissions, such as combustion emissions, extended well test emissions or flaring and venting emissions relating to a well test, using the appropriate Environmental Emissions Monitoring System (EEMS) reporting forms. In the case of atmospheric emissions relating to drilling projects undertaken from a fixed installation, they should be included in the annual EEMS reporting forms for the fixed installation.

## **7 Unauthorised deposits**

Following completion of the project covered by the screening direction, the holder of the screening direction shall recover any materials accidentally or temporarily deposited on the seabed, such as debris, temporary containers, structures or deposits, or scientific instruments, and shall return the materials to land. If it is not possible to recover any of these deposits, full details of the materials remaining on the seabed must be reported to the Department in accordance with the requirements of Petroleum Operations Notice No.2 (PON2).

## **8 Screening direction variation**

In the event that the holder of the screening direction proposes changes to any of the particulars detailed in the application for a screening direction, the holder must notify the Department immediately and submit an application for a post screening direction amendment. The post screening direction must be in place prior to the amended proposals taking effect.



## COMMENTS ON THE APPLICATION FOR SCREENING DIRECTION

### Section 1

The attention of screening direction holders is drawn to the following provisions regarding The Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration, Production, Unloading and Storage (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2020.

1) You are deemed to have satisfied yourself that there are no barriers, legal or otherwise, to the carrying out of the project covered by the screening direction. The issue of a screening direction does not absolve the screening direction holder from obtaining such authorisations, consents etc that may be required under any other legislation.

2) The Department would draw your attention to the following comments:

The Department has no comments.

3) All communications relating to the screening direction should be addressed to:

#### **Out-of-hours emergency screening direction variations:**

Telephone Met Office out-of-hours service (0330 135 0010) and ask to be connected to the Department's On-call Response Officer (Offshore Environmental Inspectorate).

#### **Routine communications**

bst@beis.gov.uk

or

Offshore Petroleum Regulator for Environment & Decommissioning  
Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy  
AB1 Building  
Crimon Place  
Aberdeen  
AB10 1BJ

Tel [REDACTED]  
Fax



## **SCHEDULE OF SCREENING DIRECTION DECISION REASONS**

The Secretary of State has decided that, based on the information provided, the project is not likely to have a significant effect on the environment. The main reasons for this decision are:

### **1) Decision Reasons**

This document provides a summary of the assessments undertaken by OPRED to determine whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is required for this project. This document summarises the information considered, the potential impacts and sets out the main reasons for the decision made.

In considering whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is required or not, the following have been taken into account:

- a. Information provided by the developer.
- b. Matters listed in Schedule 5 of The Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration, Production, Unloading and Storage (Environmental Impact Regulations 2020) (the Regulations).
- c. Results of any developer assessments of the effects on the environment of the project; and
- d. Any conditions that the Secretary of State may attach to the agreement to the grant of consent.

### **Characteristics of the Project**

Having regard, in particular, to the matters identified at paragraphs 1(a) to (g) of Schedule 5 to the Regulations, the characteristics of the project include the following:

The Fotla Exploration Well 22/1b-FEX will be drilled from the WilPhoenix semi-submersible drilling rig, with operations expected to last 95 days. The drilling rig will be working within a well-developed area of the Central North Sea and cumulative impacts from drilling discharges, atmospheric release and oil and chemical releases have been assessed. It has been concluded that there will be no cumulative impacts expected to occur from this project due to the selection of low bioaccumulation water-based muds, the proposed mitigation and the short duration of the project.

The well will be drilled with a combination of Water Based Mud (WBM) and Oil Based Mud (OBM). The WBM will be discharged to the seabed, while the OBM and cuttings will be skipped and shipped onshore for disposal.

It is not considered to be likely that the project will be affected by natural disasters and the risk of a major accident such as a well blowout has been assessed. The Developer has control measures in place to reduce the risk of a major accident occurring and the probability of such an event occurring is very low.



## Location of the Project

Having regard in particular to the matters identified at paragraphs 2(a) to (c) of Schedule 5 to the Regulations, the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by the project has been considered as follows:

Fotla exploration well is located approximately 46 km from the UK/Norwegian median line and 176 km from the Scottish mainland. The project is on the south eastern edge of the Fladen Ground and comprises deep circalittoral mud and sand with no evidence of gravel. Mean water depth is approximately 123m from the eastern to around 137m in the north west of the area. The wave height within the area averages at 2.24m, with varying wave heights from 1.5m in the summer to 2.95m in winter. Sediment samples taken during a recent survey indicate that sediments were either classed as sandy mud, or muddy sand.

Depressions were observed in the survey were interpreted as pockmarks. However further investigation showed that based on the geophysical survey results, none of the pockmarks contained Methane Derived Authigenic Carbonate (MDAC).

Predicted seabed habitats in the Fotla area comprise deep circalittoral mud, transitioning to deep circalittoral sand in the shallower waters to the south. Recent seabed surveys showed that the Fotla area had a community dominated by polychaetes and molluscs. Epibenthic fauna was sparse, with the most frequently observed including sea pens, Norway Lobster, sea urchin and krill. Faunal tracks, tubes and burrows were observed across all sampling stations, however the survey concluded the burrows did not form prominent features of the seabed.

No communities of conservation significance (including OSPAR listed threatened and/or declining habitat species) were considered to be present within the survey area.

Fotla exploration well is not situated within any conservation areas, with the nearest SPA being Buchan Ness to Collieston Coast SPA, 176km away. The closest SAC is Scanner Pockmark (37 km) which is designated for habitat submarine structures made by leaking gases. The closest NCMPA is the Norwegian Boundary and Sediment Plan (26km) designated for *Arctica islandica* aggregations (including sands and gravels as the supporting habitat).

The Fotla area lies within a recognised area for peak spawning of five species of fish, with spawning periods of lemon sole, mackerel, sandeels and lobster coinciding with operations. Lemon sole and mackerel being pelagic spawners are both thought to be impacted by the siting of the drilling rig, and although the operational window extends to November 2021, it is thought that operations will conclude earlier, with no significant impact on the remaining species.

There are no wrecks designated under the Protection of Military Remains within 10km of the area. One wreck (Palmyra) is located to the north of the well location whilst another (Whyalla) is located 14km south. There are no wind farms close to the area, with two under construction (NE7 and NE12), 91km and 71km respectively



away. The closest cable to the area is the CNS Fibre Optic telecom cable which is 16km to the south of the well location. It is not anticipated that the operations at Fotla will have a significant impact on either the wrecks, cables or windfarms.

No other protected sites are located within 40km of the Fotla exploration well area.

Given the location of the project, it is not likely that the areas identified at paragraphs 2(c)(i), (iii), (iv), (vi), (vii) of Schedule 5 to the Regulations will be affected by the project.

### **Type and characteristics of the potential impact**

In accordance with paragraph 3 of Schedule 5 to the Regulations, the likely significant effects of the project on the environment have been considered. Potential effects on the environment from the activities associated with the project were assessed, including impacts arising from atmospheric emissions, seabed disturbance, physical presence, planned discharges and accidental spills.

Other than the matters considered further below, there is not likely to be any significant impact of the project on population and human health.

There will be a 500 m radius safety zone around the WilPhoenix semi-submersible drilling rig, which excludes unauthorised access of vessels and prohibiting access to fishing vessels. No additional impacts are identified as part of the drilling of well 22/01b.

Cuttings from the WBM sections will be discharged at the seabed and into the water column. Data gathered from studies in the area show that the surface hole cuttings are predicted to disperse from the area around the wellhead naturally over time.

Seabed disturbance from the anchor chains from the WilPhoenix drilling rig were assessed, resulting in a total disturbance area of 800m<sup>2</sup> (rig positioning and lateral motion of anchor chains). Polychaete species, which dominate the area, have high recovery rates and it is expected that adult mobility from neighbouring areas will be high and areas of disturbance will recover. Also, due to the small area of disturbance, the water depths and low tidal energy, it is expected that the localised disturbed areas will recover over the medium to long term. The placement of the drilling rig and its anchor chains are not expected to have a significant impact on the seabed.

The nearest boundary (UK/Norwegian median) is located approximately 46 km from the proposed well location. It is not considered likely that any planned operational discharge (cuttings and chemicals) will be detectable at a distance of 46km from the proposed well.





The Fotla exploration well is expected to produce crude oil. The Fotla Exploration Well Temporary Operations Oil Pollution Emergency Plan (TOOPEP) was approved in 2021, which assess the worst-case assessment of an oil spill from the well operations. The TOOPEP contains proposed measures to prevent and respond to a worst-case hydrocarbon release addresses the offshore response to a hydrocarbon release from the WilPhoenix drilling rig.

A worst-case major accident scenario resulting from a potential well blow-out was modelled and assessed.

The Developer has a number of mitigation and control measures in place to reduce the risk of a major accident occurring and the probability of such an event occurring (including the worst-case scenario identified above) is very low.

There will be no well test or vertical seismic profiling carried out.

## **Decision**

Taking the above considerations into account, the Secretary of State has concluded that the project is not likely to have a significant impact on the environment and that an environmental impact assessment is not required.

## **2) Mitigation of significant effects**

The following are features of the project or measures envisaged that the developer has proposed to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment:

Not applicable