

Our Ref: 01.01.01.01-4906U
UKOP Doc Ref:1193619



Offshore Petroleum Regulator
for Environment & Decommissioning

REPSOL SINOPEC RESOURCES UK LIMITED
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Registered No.: 00825828

Date: 7th March 2022

Department for Business, Energy
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Dear Sir / Madam

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

**BLAKE FIELD:PRODUCER WELL 13/24a-B8y (PREVIOUS B2z/B8 DRY HOLE &
B8z PILOT HOLE)**

I refer to your amended application dated 4th March 2022, reference DR/2203/2 (Version 2).

It has been determined that the proposed changes to the project is not likely to result in a significant effect on the environment, and therefore an environmental impact assessment is not required.

A screening direction is therefore issued for the changes to the project. An amended schedule of conditions, comments, and main reasons for the decision on the amended application, 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.

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**

**BLAKE FIELD:PRODUCER WELL 13/24a-B8y (PREVIOUS B2z/B8 DRY HOLE &
B8z PILOT HOLE)**

DR/2203/2 (Version 2)

Whereas REPSOL SINOPEC RESOURCES UK LIMITED has made an application dated 4th March 2022, 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 agreement to the Oil and Gas Authority to the grant of consent for the project as detailed in the application WONS/13532/0/IDA/1 Version 3.

Effective Date: 7th March 2022



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 17 December 2021 until 31 May 2022.

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

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.

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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:

DR/2203/2 (Version 2)

Impact from milling out cement must be included in future submissions. Cod is on the IUCN list as vulnerable, the impact is therefore based on this not potential for fishing.

(1) It is advised that for impacts on aquaculture and Shellfish Water Protected Areas the following information sources would be useful in demonstrating this:

The National Marine Plan interactive
(<https://marinescotland.atkinsgeospatial.com/nmpi/>);

Shellfish Water Protected Areas
(<https://www.gov.scot/policies/water/protected-waters/>);

Scotland's Aquaculture website (<http://aquaculture.scotland.gov.uk/map/map.aspx>);

The Scottish Shellfish Farm Production survey 2020
(<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-shellfish-farm-production-survey-2020/>)
(These statistics are usually published in May each year);

The Scottish Finfish Farm Production survey 2020
(<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-fish-farm-production-survey-2020/>) (These statistics are usually published in September each year).

(2) MSS would like to request copies of the following survey reports cited in this submission for our archive. Please note that survey reports held by Marine Scotland may be made publicly available and published on the Marine Scotland website:

ERT (2002). Ross Field Area (UKCS Blocks 13/28a and 29a) Seabed Environmental Survey, September 2002. Final Report ERTSL 880/3, issued January 2003.



Gardline Environmental Ltd (2006). Floyd & Associates Ltd for BG Group. Hermes Site Survey UKCS 13/22c. December 2005 to January 2006. Environmental Baseline Report. Gardline Report Reference 6604.

Gardline Environmental Ltd (2007). Floyd & Associates Ltd for Oilexco North Sea Ltd. UKCS 13/30 'Oddjob' Rig Site and Habitat Assessment Survey. February 2007. Environmental Baseline Report. Gardline Report Reference 7151.

Gardline Environmental Ltd (2008). Floyd & Associates Ltd for BG Group. Blake B6 Site Survey and Habitat Assessment Survey Block 13/24. September and October 2006. Environmental Baseline Report. Gardline Report Reference 7025.1.

Gardline Environmental Ltd (2009). UKCS 13/24 Blake FBA; Environmental Baseline Report; 8241 Issue Date: 9th August 2010

Gardline (2013). Dana Petroleum Ltd. UKCS 13/23d Liberator site survey June 2013. Environmental baseline report. Gardline report Ref 9603.2 (final). Client reference 2169-0143-DANA. Revision 2, 29th November 2013. Gardline Environmental Ltd., Great Yarmouth, UK.

MG3 (2017). North Sea Survey Blocks 13/23c, 13/23d, 13/24a, 13/28b and 13/29b Liberator and Blake: Environmental and Habitat Assessment Survey Report 2017 (within Blake Infill Project ES; D/4244/2019).

(3) Reference to the 'Gonz lez-Irusta and Wright (2016)' report is welcomed. This report also highlights that cod show a preference for coarse sand as a spawning substrate compared with mud or sand. This information could be compared to the site specific sediment analysis to further determine the likelihood of cod spawning in the area.

(4) Further information on sandeel spawning is available in the following reports: Lancaster, J. (Ed.), McCallum, S., Lowe A.C., Taylor, E., Chapman A. & Pomfret, J. (2014). Development of detailed ecological guidance to support the application of the Scottish MPA selection guidelines in Scotland's seas. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No.491. Sandeels - supplementary document (Available from Scottish Natural Heritage) and Mazik, K., Strong, J., Little, S., Bhatia, N., Mander, L., Barnard, S. & Elliott, M. (2015). A review of the recovery potential and influencing factors of relevance to the management of habitats and species within Marine Protected Areas around Scotland. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 771. Available online at <https://www.nature.scot/snh-commissioned-report-771-review-recovery-potential-and-influencing-fa>

(5) Reference to The Marine Life Information Network (MarLIN) which contains a sensitivity review showing that Nephrops are tolerant to pressures such as smothering (by 5 cm of sediment) maybe useful. It would be useful to compare this information to the expected deposits associated with the drilling of this well. More information can be obtained here: <https://www.marlin.ac.uk/species/detail/1672>.



(6) MSS has recently added new spatial layers to the Marine Scotland MAPS National Marine Plan interactive (NMPi) showing predicted seabed habitats and sediment types, which are advised, to provide additional regional context. These spatial layers may be viewed on the Marine Scotland MAPS National Marine Plan interactive (NMPi) web site:

<https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/marine/seamanagement/nmpihome>

(7) Finalised Scottish Government fisheries statistics for 2020 were published in October 2021. These are now available through the Marine Scotland Data page: <https://data.marine.gov.scot/group/fisheries>. Operators are advised to refer to the combined Excel spreadsheets which include statistics for 2016 - 2020. These are available on the following web page (doi: 10.7489/12378-1).

<https://data.marine.gov.scot/dataset/2020-scottish-sea-fisheries-statistics-fishing-effort-and-quantity>

(8) MSS advise that the Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy 2020 is taken into account. Further information may be obtained here: <http://marine.gov.scot/information/sectoral-marine-plan-offshore-wind-energy-plan-options>.

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 [REDACTED]



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

The following provides a summary of the assessment undertaken by OPRED to determine whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is required for this project, 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 has been taken into account:

- a) the information provided by the developer.
- b) the matters listed in Schedule 5 of The Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration, Production, Unloading and Storage (Environmental Impact Regulations 2020) (the Regulations).
- c) the results of any preliminary verifications or 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 the 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:

Summary of the Project

Drilling of the 13/24a-B2Z (post spud name B8) attic subsea producer well

Drilling of a 38", 26", 17.5", 12.25" and 8.5" sections using water-based mud.

All cuttings and drilling fluid will be directly discharged to sea (fluids re-circulated to rig and re-used where possible prior to discharge).

Installation of Blow Out Preventor (BOP)

Run and cement a 30" conductor. Run and cement 20", 13-3/8", 10-3/4 x9-5/8" casings and perform Formation Integrity Tests.

After 8.5" section, well cleaned by displacing to Water Based Mud (WBM), Pulling out of hole at target depth prior to cleaning and running completion.

Drilling of two 12.25" and 8.5" sections with riser using WBM.

Well bore clean up, flowed to clean up by well testing and completed.

In the dry hole case, abandonment of 8.5" section with cement barrier.

Drilling of 13/24a- B8z (pilot hole geological side track)



Still in B2z (B8) wellbore, cut and pull 10 3/4"x 9 5/8" casing.
Set cement barrier at the 13 3/8" casing.
Initiate geological side track at 13 3/8" cement, drilling an 8.5" section pilot hole.
Section to be logged while drilling to appraise reservoir in new attic location.
No casing, completion, clean-up to flow and test required for B8z pilot hole.
Section appraised then abandoned with a cement barrier.

Drilling of 13/24a-B8y producer/ development well

Drilling of 12-1/4" and 8-1/2" sections side tracked from B8 13-3/8" casing.
Four targets, T1- 12-1/4" section, T2 - horizontal 8-1/2" section, T3/T4 dropped below horizontal continuing 8-1/2" section.
WBM and cuttings discharged from rig (WBM recirculated to rig and re-used where possible prior to discharge).
Casing for T1 run to 2,000 ft above reservoir and cemented in place.
Lower completion run, well displaced to inhibited brine.
Subsea production tree run, BOP recovered, upper completion run.
Well flowed to rig for well test clean up.
Well tree tested and over trawl structure located over it.
Development well anticipated to be target 4 (T4).

Description of the Project

Original project

The project was the drilling of a new subsea production well, Blake 13/24a B2z (B8) attic well using the COSL Pioneer semi-submersible rig which was positioned using 8 anchors. The Blake 13/24a B2z (B8) well was drilled as a single horizontal well targeting attic oil at 5 reservoir locations (T1, T2, T3, T4 and T5) to enable development of a Blake B2z (post drilling name B8) infill production well. Cuttings from the 38 x 20 and 26 sections were discharged directly to the seabed whilst drilling these sections riserless along with WBM. Cuttings from the lower-hole sections were discharged overboard to the sea surface from the drilling rig along with WBM, the latter circulated back to rig and re-used where possible.

As part of the B2z (B8) project a trial of the cement system was undertaken using a simple test mix. Overboard discharge of the cement mix is both the Best Practicable Environmental Option and Best Environmental Practice. Casings were run and cemented into place to provide structural strength for B2z (B8) production well.

Once drilling and cementing operations were complete for 13/24a-B2Z (B8) a wellbore clean-out and completion operation was proposed. Clean-up being carried out using FLOTHRU SRF WBM and filtered treated NaCl brine. A wellbore clean-up string was to be run to clean up the wellbore above the isolated lower screen completion. The Roemex RX-03 well cleaner clean-up pill and hi-vis pills was to be pumped and the well displaced to brine with discharge of well clean up fluids. The WBM used for running the screens was to be displaced from the wellbore and discharged to sea. The well was dry and therefore not cleaned-up to flow and no well



test carried out as described in OGA well application reference WONS/13532/0/IDA/1), superseded by WONS/13974/0 and it was not fully completed resulting in no discharge of wellbore clean up fluids or produced fluids during well testing containing minimal reservoir hydrocarbon and a lower amount of cuttings due to shorter well length drilled. The B2z (B8) well was to have an over trawl structure placed over the well tree to provide protection from snagging hazards e.g. fisheries, this is no longer required.

Project change - dry well, drilling pilot appraisal hole

The well programme was foreshortened as it was found to be a dry hole with no commercially viable hydrocarbons. The S8 lower well section was abandoned by cutting and pulling the 10 3/4" x 9 5/8" casing to surface and setting an 800 foot cement barrier down hole.

The project was changed to enable the drilling of a geological side-track 8-1/2" section pilot hole by placing a further cement barrier at the 13 3/8" casing shoe. The side track was initiated here logging while drilling to assess another attic area of the same reservoir. No casing was required for the geological side-track 8.5" section. This pilot hole, to be known as B8z was appraised and then abandoned with an 800 foot cement barrier. Cuttings and WBM from the 8.5" pilot hole were discharged overboard from the rig, WBM recirculated to rig and re-used where possible prior to discharge). Cuttings were forecast to contain minimal reservoir hydrocarbon, treated and analysed prior to discharge. There was no significant change to overall cuttings volumes as a result of the additional pilot hole side-track, cuttings being reduced by a shorter B2z (B8) well being drilled and the pilot hole contained minimal reservoir hydrocarbon. During normal cementing operations any discharges of cement mixture were limited. The 13/24a B8 pilot well had a packer set but was not fully completed, being an appraisal pilot hole and was abandoned as described see OGA well application reference WONS/13974/0/GS/1 Version 1.

Project change - to drill geological side track development well 13/24a-B8y

A further change has been made to the project as per OGA application reference: WONS/14015/0/GS/1 Version 1. The proposal being to drill the 13/24a-B8y development well as a side track from the 13-3/8" casing shoe previously abandoned. The well will target four locations (T1 to T4). It will start as a horizontal well, directionally drilling a 12-1/4" section to T1, 8-1/2" section geosteered to T2 then deviated below horizontal to T3 and through to T4. The first section will be cased (9-5/8") and cemented with top of cement well above reservoir. Cuttings and WBM will be discharged from the rig, WBM recirculated to rig and re-used where possible prior to discharge. Cuttings are forecast to contain minimal reservoir hydrocarbon, being treated and analysed prior to discharge. Cuttings generated from drilling the 8-1/2" pilot hole and B8y well increased marginally, being offset by a shorter B2z (B8) well being drilled. Completion screens will be run and the well cleaned to inhibited brine, suspended, subsea production tree placed, upper completion run, the well flowed to rig for well test clean up and left to connect up to production at Bleo Holm Floating Production Storage and Offloading vessel (FPSO). Wellbore clean up fluid



and produced fluids during well testing containing minimal reservoir hydrocarbon will be treated and analysed prior to discharge.

There is not likely to be any significant impact from the project on population or human health. It is not considered to be likely that the project will be affected by natural disasters. No pollution or nuisances are foreseen from the project. Drill cuttings from the hydrocarbon bearing zone of B8z pilot hole and B8y contain minimal hydrocarbons. Cuttings will be treated and analysed prior to discharge and drill fluids recirculated to rig and re-used.

No cumulative impacts are expected to occur with any other existing or approved projects. 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:

Well 13/24a-B2Z (B8) attic (which includes the geological side-track B8z and further B8y side track are located approximately 65 m from the Blake manifold (Blake Field), approximately 64km east of the Scottish coastline and 170 km west of the UK/ Norwegian median line. Water depth at the drilling location is 101 metres. Tidal currents in the vicinity of Block 13/24 are typical of the offshore central North Sea, with relatively weak surface current speeds for mean spring tides of ca. 0.39 m/s. The annual mean significant wave height around the Blake field ranges from 2.03 to 2.11 m, with a mean spring tidal range of 2.07 to 2.25 m.

Surveys of the area indicated a homogenous seabed where sediments generally consisted of medium to fine sands with shell fragments, with coarse sediment (sandy gravel with cobbles) in some areas. Environmental baseline surveys of the area found that the benthic community of the area was polychaete-dominated which is typical of this region of the North Sea. Faunal analysis found the Annelida (polychaeta) group dominated in terms of number of individuals, with the Mollusca and Crustacea the second and third largest contributors respectively. Epifauna was found to be scarce, which mostly consisted of mobile echinoderms (Asteroidea and Ophiuroidea). Benthic infauna observed mainly consisted of polychaete tubes, notably of serpulid polychaetes and of *Lanice conchilega*. There was no evidence of any Annex I habitats, or UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority marine species and habitats. Although the sea pen *P. phosphorea* was abundant in some areas, only a few burrows were noted and mobile epifauna were sparse. It was therefore considered that there was little evidence of the potential sea pen and burrowing megafauna communities, which is a threatened and / or declining habitat under OSPAR (2008).

The proposed operations will coincide with the spawning periods of cod (with



aggregative spawning behaviour and seasonal fidelity), whiting, plaice, Norway pout, sprat, lemon sole, sandeel and Nephrops. There is a low-medium probability of blue whiting, hake, haddock, sole, sprat and whiting aggregations and a high probability of anglerfish and Norway pout aggregations. The period of operations will coincide with periods of low to high seabird sensitivity for Block 13/24, with most months coinciding with periods of low vulnerability except for December and January where vulnerability is high.

During the proposed period of operations low to very high numbers of cetaceans have been sighted in the area of the project, especially white-beaked dolphin and harbour porpoise. However, based on available data Block 13/24 is not considered to be significant for feeding, breeding, juvenile or migrating marine mammals. There are no Offshore Marine Protected Area's in the vicinity of the project. The project is in the National Marine Plan Area for Scotland. Data indicates that fishing effort in ICES rectangle 45E8 during 2019 recorded an annual total of 797 days, where the most heavily fished month was May. Fishing effort in ICES rectangle 45E8 is dominated by trawling gears.

A vessel traffic survey was undertaken which concluded that 33 routes with an estimated 2,024 vessels per annum were identified within 10nm radius of the project location, which equates to 5-6 vessels per day, where offshore support vessels dominate. A collision risk assessment was undertaken which concluded a below historical average vessel collision frequency. The project is within an existing 500m safety zone and further risk management measures will be put in place.

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.

The discharge of chemicals used to drill the B2z (B8) well, B8z pilot side track and B8y, including drill fluids, cementing, completion and well clean-up operations have been assessed and are not considered to have a likely significant environmental impact.

In addition, wellbore clean up fluids contained no reservoir hydrocarbon for B2z (B8) well and an insignificant quantity for B8z and B8y side tracks. Cuttings must be treated and analysed prior to discharge. The volume of drill cuttings for discharge has not changed significantly as a result of B2z (B8) well not being fully drilled. Cuttings will form a pile around the wellbore (1.2m height). They will quickly reduce with distance. The area where deposition is predicted to be above 6.5 mm is



predominantly within around 60 m of the well. This discharge was assessed and is not considered to have a likely significant effect on the environment. The drilling of the further B8y side-track does not alter the original conclusion. Impacts on the seabed and associated benthic fauna is expected within a few hundred metres of the well, but recovery over a short period of time is also expected due to dispersion, dilution of the cuttings and through bioturbation and therefore the impacts of the drill cuttings are not considered to have a significant effect on the environment. In addition, although the proposed drilling activities coincide with fish spawning, notably potential aggregate cod spawning, the pelagic spawning species, which release their eggs into the water column are unlikely to be affected by disturbance to the seabed. Cod spawning is less likely at Blake with finer sediment than preferred. Nephrops and sandeels are demersal species recorded as spawning in the vicinity of Blake during the proposed drilling period. The sediment type in this area is primarily sandy and therefore Nephrops are less likely to be present with insignificant impact on sandeel spawning. It can be concluded that the project will not have a significant effect on fish populations.

Operations covered by this permit will coincide with periods of low to high seabird sensitivity for Block 13/24. There are no marine protected areas in the vicinity of the project. Mitigation is in place to ensure the risk of any release or discharge that could be harmful to seabirds is minimised. The project is not considered to have a significant impact on seabirds.

Fin whale, humpback whale, common dolphin, harbour porpoise, killer whale, minke whale, white-beaked dolphin, white-sided dolphin, bottlenose dolphin and pilot whale have been sighted during the proposed period of operations within the project area. Given the natural avoidance behaviour of cetaceans, it is not expected that these species would be significantly impacted by the project.

The project continues to use the COSL Pioneer semi-submersible drilling rig. The maximum disturbance area of the anchors has been calculated to be 198m² with the depth of penetration being 1m. The mooring chains have a worse case disturbance of 47,680m². Anchoring the COSL Pioneer has the potential to cause disturbance to the seabed and marine communities, including direct loss of habitat and sessile seabed organisms. The anchors will remain submerged in the sediment during operations and the disturbance will be greatest during the laying and retrieval of the anchors. Further seabed disturbance will result from the over trawl structure to be placed over the well tree, formerly proposed for B2z (B8) well and now to be placed for the B8y side-track production well which is estimated to have a disturbance area of 27 m². Seabed disturbance impacts are temporary and not considered to be significant.

There is a 500 m radius safety zone around the location of the project, excluding unauthorised access by vessels and prohibiting access to fishing vessels. Probability of collision risk is exceptionally low and effects on shipping navigation are considered not to be significant. Appropriate measures will also be in place to manage any risk to other users of the sea.



There are no expected transboundary effects from the drilling operations at the project location. The nearest boundary (UK/Norway Median Line) is located approximately 170 km away. It is not considered likely that any planned operational discharge (chemicals, hydrocarbon) will be detectable at this distance from the drilling site.

Although not a planned activity, a worst-case major accident scenario resulting from a potential well blow-out was modelled and assessed. The probability of a large oil spill from the proposed operations is low and remains the same. Therefore, it is considered that the control measures in place to prevent loss of well control minimise the risk of an oil spill which could have a significant impact and the proposed operations carried out as planned are not likely to have a significant effect on the environment.

The largest component related to atmospheric emissions is expected to be from the drilling rig and well clean-up to flare proposed for the B8y well rather than original B2z (B8 dry well). Emissions were previously assessed based on a fixed rig and well test time. Assessment indicates that the project will generate emissions that are a relatively small proportion of emissions arising from UKCS oil and gas production. No well testing was required for B2z (B8) or B8z side track pilot hole but has been proposed for B8y well instead. Several control and mitigation measures will also be in place to minimise impacts. It can therefore be concluded that any impacts from emissions from the project are not considered to be significant. The drilling operations do not contradict any of the Scottish Marine Plan objectives and policies. It is considered that the drilling of the well is not likely to have a significant impact with other offshore activities or other users of the sea and no cumulative impacts are expected to occur.

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:

There are no significant adverse effects on the environment.