

Our Ref: 01.01.01.01-5746U
UKOP Doc Ref:1297715



Offshore Petroleum Regulator
for Environment & Decommissioning

EQUINOR ENERGY AS
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NORWAY

Date: 25th September 2023

Department for Energy Security &
Net Zero

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Crimon Place
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Fax

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Dear Sir / Madam

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

UTGARD, Transocean Enabler DRILLING PRODUCER WELL 16/18a-G1

A screening direction for the project detailed in your application, reference DR/2395/0 (Version 1), dated 6th July 2023 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 opred@energysecurity.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**

UTGARD, Transocean Enabler DRILLING PRODUCER WELL 16/18a-G1

DR/2395/0 (Version 1)

Whereas EQUINOR ENERGY AS has made an application dated 6th July 2023, 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/15544/0/GS/1.

Effective Date: 25th September 2023



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 25 September 2023 until 30 April 2024.

2 Commencement and completion of the project

The holder of the screening direction must notify the Department for Energy Security & Net Zero (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: opred@energysecurity.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:

The department has no comments

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

opred@energysecurity.gov.uk

or

Offshore Petroleum Regulator for Environment & Decommissioning
Department for Energy Security & Net Zero
AB1 Building
Crimon Place
Aberdeen
AB10 1BJ

Tel [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 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 have 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.

Summary of the project

The drilling of a sidetrack well (Well G-1 AH) from an existing producer well (mother bore G-1 H) in the Utgard field. Drilling will be undertaken from the Transocean Enabler semi-submersible mobile offshore drilling unit (MODU). Works are covered by NSTA well application WONS/15544/0/GS/1.

Drilling operations will take place in an established 500m zone however the MODU will have mooring chain and anchors that stretch beyond the 500m zone. Operations are planned to commence on the 5th of October 2023 and will take an estimated 62 days to complete.

The new Utgard sidetrack well will kick-off as a 16" open hole (OH) sidetrack from below the 20" casing shoe in the existing (G-1 H) well. The Utgard sidetrack well will comprise three sections (16", 12 " and 8 ") with a target of 4,103 m MD. All 3 sections will be drilled with Oil Based Mud (OBM) and all cuttings and discharges containing OBM will be skipped and shipped to shore.



The existing G-1-H Utgard well will be permanently plugged and abandoned at 1,110 m MD in the existing 16" section.

The MODU and drill site are both located on the Norwegian continental shelf (NCS), the sidetrack well will cross the national boundary subsurface and access the reservoir on the UK continental shelf (UKCS). Most of the drilling operation will be assessed and regulated under the Norwegian regulatory regime. This assessment summary only considers those aspects of the activity which occur on the UKCS.

Description of the project

The Utgard field is a producing field on the UKCS tied back to the Equinor operated

Sleipner Platform on the NCS. Well G-1 AH will be drilled as a sidetrack from the existing Well G-1 Hproducer. The objective of the sidetrack is to produce remaining gas in the western segment of the Utgard Field that is assumed to be left behind by the mother bore G-1 H. The existing well bore will be permanently plugged and abandoned as extensive water breakthrough has significantly reduced its productivity.

The drilling operations will be undertaken on the NCS and will be subject to assessment and approval under the Norwegian regulatory regime. This assessment summary only considers those aspects of the activity which will specifically occur on the UKCS.

The Utgard sidetrack well will comprise three sections, detailed below:

16" Section - Length of Section 1991m - Weight of Cuttings 79600kg

12.25" Section - Length of Section 662m - Weight of Cuttings 155000kg

8.5" - Length of Section 340m - Weight of Cuttings 39000kg

Well target depth is 4,103 m MD and this will lie under the UKCS. The UK intersection of the sidetrack will be at 2,040 m MD in the 16" section.

Oil based mud will be used in all 3 well sections but this will all be recovered and recycled ashore meaning there will be no discharge of fluids or cuttings contaminated by OBM. The use and discharge of chemicals will be assessed and permitted under the Norwegian permitting regime as this will occur via the MODU on the NCS.

The existing G-1-H Utgard well will be permanently plugged and abandoned at a depth of 1110m MD. The P&A operations will include the following:

- Cement plugs set in the 9 " casing and/or the 7" liner for pre-P&A of the reservoir to ensure well integrity;



- A base case 300 m cement pre-P&A barrier plugs set in 9 " casing (at 3,400-3,100 m MD);

- A contingency case will include, 250 m cement pre-P&A barrier plugs set in the 7" liner (at 3,800-3,550 m MD) and 250 m in the 9 " liner (at 3,200 - 2,950 m MD);

Explosives will be used as part of the plug and abandonment (P&A) operations in the 9 " casing. However, this will be deep within the well (at a depth of approximately 3,000-3,500 m MD) meaning it is unlikely that sound will be emitted at the surface.

The MODU will utilise an eight anchor-mooring system to maintain its position. Each mooring line will consist of approximately 1,350 to 1,620 m of 84 mm diameter bottom chain and approximately 800 m of fibre rope connected to 8, 15-tonne Mk 6 anchors. 3 of these anchors and the connecting chain are located in the UKCS and will be pre-laid 14 days in advance of the MODU arriving, they will be on the seabed for 90 days.

The proposed project area is within a well-developed area of the North Sea, but it has been concluded there will be no cumulative impacts from those aspects of the project undertaken on the UKCS.

It is not considered likely that the project will be affected by natural disasters.

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

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:-

The Utgard sidetrack well G-1 AH is located in Block 16/18a in the Northern North Sea region. The MODU and existing well head is on the Norwegian Continental shelf, 433m from the UK boundary. 2063m of the sidetrack well will be drilled below the UKCS and 3 of the anchors used in the mooring system will be located on the UKCS.

Water depths in the vicinity of the Utgard field range from approximately 100 m to 130 m (LAT) and the water depth at the Utgard well is 115 m. The prevailing winds in the NNS are from the southwest and north-northeast. Wind strengths in winter are typically in the range of Beaufort scale force 4-6 (6-11 m/s) with higher winds of force 8-12 (17-32 m/s) being much less frequent.

Sediments found within Blocks 16/18a were dominated by muddy sand and the priority marine feature 'burrowed mud' occurs in Block 16/18, the EUNIS biotope MC6 'Circalitoral mud' best describes the benthos in the vicinity of the project. Benthic



communities in the vicinity of the Utgard field are expected to be typical of the NNS. The muddy sand sediment combined with the 110-120 m depth at the Utgard area suggests that it will be dominated by the polychaetes *Heterromastus filiformis* and *Paraphinome jeffreysii*; and the dominant benthic species will be the bivalve *Thyasira equalis*. There is the potential for seapen species to be present in this habitat type, but none have been observed in the vicinity of the project.

The Norwegian Boundary Sediment Plain NC MPA is the closest protected site to the Utgard field, located approximately 21 km south-east and designated for ocean quahog aggregations in addition to the sands and gravels which act as their supporting habitat. The Scanner pockmark Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is located 34 km southwest of the Utgard field and is a designated Annex I habitat for submarine structures made by leaking gases. There are no known pockmarks in the vicinity of the Utgard field.

The operations are located in ICES rectangle 45F1, in an area known to support spawning and nursery grounds for several commercially important species. For example, it is associated with high intensity spawning for Norway pout *Trisopterus esmarkii* during Jan to April, in addition to spawning grounds for cod *Gadus morhua*, Norway lobster *Nephrops norvegicus* and mackerel *Scomber scombrus*. Example species that spawn and use the Utgard field area as a nursery ground are; anglerfish *Lophius piscatorius*, blue whiting *Micromesistius poutassou*, cod, herring *Clupea harengus*, ling *Molva molva*, mackerel, Norway pout, sandeels *Ammodytes* sp., spurdog *Squalus acanthias* and whiting *Merlangius merlangus*.

ICES rectangle 45F1 is regularly fished, fishing effort in 2021 for ICES rectangle 45F1 was highest in July (221 days) and November (230 days) whilst moderate effort occurred from February to April and in October. For the rest of 2021, effort was considered low or disclosive. The greatest yearly effort was in 2019 where a total of 1,042 days were fished, with peak effort occurring in February (275 days), April (209 days) and July (264 days). The predominant gear type used in ICES rectangle 45F1 is trawls, accounting for 100% of the fishing effort, with a significant effort targeting nephrops.

The following seabird species have been recorded within the area; northern fulmar; European storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*; northern gannet; great skua *Stercorarius skua*; black-legged kittiwake; great blacked-backed gull *Larus marinus*; common gull *Larus canus*; lesser black backed gull *Larus fuscus*; herring gull *Larus argentatus*; common guillemot; razorbill and Atlantic puffin *Fratercula arctica*. Seabird sensitivity in Block 16/18 is low over most of the year however it is high during April and May, noting that there is no data for November, December and January.

During the period of the proposed operations, harbour porpoise has been recorded at moderate densities and killer whale observed at low densities. Atlantic white-sided dolphin has been observed in moderate densities in June, whilst harbour porpoise has been observed in June and July. Minke whale has been observed in low densities during June and September but at high densities in July. Risso's dolphin have been recorded in low densities in June. Since the Utgard field is located



approximately 216 km offshore, grey and harbour seals may be encountered occasionally but it is not likely that they use the area with any regularity or in great numbers.

There are no known military activities in the proposed project area, the nearest submarine cable is the TAMPNET 3 (Part 7) cable which is located approximately 9 km from the Utgard field. The Scotwind NE7 Sectoral Marine Plan (SMP) area for offshore wind is located 107 km southwest of Block 16/18. There are no marine aggregate sites, protected wrecks, aquaculture or carbon capture and storage easement areas in the project footprint.

The project is located in the Scottish Marine Plan area.

Given the location of the project, the areas identified at paragraphs 2(c)(i), (iii), (iv), (vi), (vii) and (viii) of Schedule 5 are not likely to 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.

Activities occurring on the UKCS as part of the Utgard G-1 AH sidetrack well are the installation and operation of the MODU mooring system and the use of downhole explosives. All other aspects of the drilling operation occur on the NCS are assessed under the Norwegian regulatory regime.

The Mooring system will involve the use of 3 anchors and 3 lengths of chain 1350m to 1650m in length being placed in the seabed in the UKCS. There will be some disturbance to the seabed from the placement and movement of these objects which may cause some mortality of benthic species. The disturbance on the UKCS, based on an impact corridor of 10m, will be 57,722.9 m² (0.05772 km²). The circalittoral mud habitat which characterises the project area is found over large parts of the North Sea and the affected area will not represent a significant proportion of the habitat. Upon completion of the works the mooring system will be removed and the impacted habitat will be left to recover. It is expected that there will be a recolonisation of any affected species and full recovery of the habitat will occur meaning there will be no long-term impacts.

Whilst there is moderate fishing activity in the area the effects of the mooring system will not have a significant impact on fishers or other sea users. A 500 m exclusion zone will be established around the MODU and all necessary navigational aids, warnings and notifications will be delivered to reduce the risk of collision with shipping. The 3 anchors and a small portion of the mooring chain will be located on



the seabed a short distance outside of the 500 m exclusion zone. It is not expected however that there will be any interaction between fishers or shipping with the mooring system. This is because the adjacent exclusion zone and navigational notifications will ensure that shipping maintains a safe distance from all aspects of the drilling operation and a guard vessel will be on standby to monitor and warn shipping within the vicinity. The total area restricted to fishing will be small relative the available fishing grounds and the impact to fishing activity will not be significant.

Explosives will be used at a sufficient depth downhole that detonations will take place on the UKCS. These detonations will occur at a depth of greater than 1000 m, meaning that significant noise levels will not be emitted at the surface.

Consequently, the operation is not expected to emit noise levels which could influence marine life.

The project is a transboundary operation with much of the works occurring on the NCS. The works on the UKCS will not have any effects on the NCS. There will be atmospheric and marine discharges on the NCS, these will be regulated under the Norwegian regulatory regime and it is not expected that these will impact environmental receptors on the UKCS.

Atmospheric emissions will be emitted by the anchor handling vessels and the guard vessels. The scale of these emissions is small relative to the total emissions of the North Sea energy sector. The emissions may result in a deterioration of the local air quality, but due to the relatively short duration of the work, and that the exposed conditions in the area will rapidly disperse the emissions, it is not anticipated that there will be a significant impact.

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.