

Our Ref: 01.01.01.01-6506U  
UKOP Doc Ref:1384072



Offshore Petroleum Regulator  
for Environment & Decommissioning

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Registered No.: 01483021

Date: 24th February 2025

Department for Energy Security &  
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[opred@energysecurity.gov.uk](mailto:opred@energysecurity.gov.uk)

Dear Sir / Madam

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

**CYGNUS, WELL 44/12a- Slot 1 planned well**

A screening direction for the project detailed in your application, reference DR/2532/0 (Version 5), dated 21st February 2025 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](mailto: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**

**CYGNUS, WELL 44/12a- Slot 1 planned well**

**DR/2532/0 (Version 5)**

Whereas ITHACA (NE) E&P LIMITED has made an application dated 21st February 2025, 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/17153/0/PIDA/1 Version 1.

Effective Date: 24th February 2025

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## **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 24 February 2025 until 31 March 2025.

#### **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](mailto: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 Mitigation measures

a) Conductor driving operations must be undertaken in accordance with the current JNCC 2010 ' *Statutory nature conservation agency protocol for minimising the risk of injury to marine mammals from piling noise* '.

b) The pre-conductor driving search and soft start should be timed to occur during hours of daylight/good visibility to allow a marine mammal observer (MMO) to observe for any marine mammals within 500m of the sound source, and if necessary, delay the soft start if animals are detected within this zone.

c) As a minimum, one dedicated MMO should be used. They should be fully trained and not have a dual role onboard (for example, in addition to being an MMO also work as a Fisheries Liaison Officer (FLO)).

d) A proven PAM system, i.e. one that has been successfully demonstrated to be able to detect vocalising marine mammals, must be available on the jack-up rig or the Cygnus Alpha Wellhead Platform to undertake acoustic monitoring if any search or soft start procedure is undertaken during periods when visual observations are not effective because of the weather conditions or sea state. Conductor driving operations must be delayed if it is not possible to undertake the acoustic monitoring during the relevant periods. (Further information can be found in the JNCC guidelines).

e) PAM operatives must be familiar with acoustic monitoring techniques and the requirements of the JNCC guidelines and reporting forms. (Further information can be found in the JNCC guidelines).

f) The applicant must inform OPRED within two days of the commencement and then completion of the proposed operations.

g) At the end of the conductor driving operations, a report (indicating the OPRED reference number) should be sent to the JNCC. This report should detail the soft start procedures, any visual observations/PAM detections and include the Marine Mammal Recording Forms (i.e. the excel spreadsheet) in its original format (i.e. not converted to a pdf). Any difficulties encountered, or recommendations that may be of use for future work should be included within the report.

h) A conductor driving close-out report must be made directly through the UK Marine Noise Registry (<https://mnr.jncc.gov.uk/>) within 12 weeks of the date of expiry of the Screening Direction. If the conductor driving operation is cancelled for any reason, a close-out report must still be submitted to confirm that the survey was not undertaken.

i) Conductor driving operations shall be completed by the 31st of March 2025. If operations are going to take place from 1st April 2025 onwards, a variation to this Screening Direction will have to be submitted and approved before conductor driving



operations can commence.

## **6 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.

## **7 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.

## **8 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).

## **9 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/2532/0 (Version 5) - 23rd February 2025:**

(1) Should a variation to this application be required, Ithaca will need to commit to joining and coordinating with the 2025 Development Coordination Forum to ensure noise thresholds in the Southern North Sea SAC are not exceeded.

(2) Conductor driving cannot continue beyond 31st March 2025.

(3) The present application only considers conductor driving of the 44/12a- Slot 1 well. Activities related to drilling the 44/12a- Slot 1 well will need to be covered by a variation of this screening direction.

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**

### **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.

### **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:

#### **Summary of the project**

Driving of a 30" conductor into the seabed at the Cygnus Alpha Wellhead Platform (44/12a- Slot 1 well) from the Valaris Norway jack-up rig in the Southern North Sea.

Operations are due to last 1 day.

NSTA consent application reference: WONS/17153/0/PIDA/1 Version 1

This application only covers activities relating to conductor driving and not drilling the well.

#### **Description of the project**

This project involves the driving of a conductor (44/12a- Slot 1) at the Cygnus Alpha Wellhead Platform from the Valaris Norway jack-up rig. The impacts associated with the placement of the jack-up rig have been considered in DR/2500/2.

It is estimated that the project will take up to 1 day between 24th February 2025 and 31st March 2025 to account for operational delays.

The conductor will be driven in batch with three other conductors (44/12a-AAF,



44/12a- AJ and 44/12a- Slot 6). The 44/12a-AAF well will then be drilled, followed by the well associated with the 44/12a- AJ well. However, this application covers only the activities associated with driving the conductor for 44/12a- Slot 1 well outlined in the summary of the project above. Activities related to drilling the 44/12a- Slot 1 well will be covered by a future application.

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

Other than the matters considered further below, there is not likely to be any significant impact of the project on 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 proposed well is located at the Cygnus field, next to the Cygnus Alpha Wellhead Platform in the Southern North Sea (SNS), in UKCS Block 44/12, approximately 162 kilometres (km) from the UK coastline, and 36 km from the UK/Netherlands Median Line, in a depth of approximately 22 metres (m).

Site specific surveys confirmed that surficial seabed sediments are generally slightly gravelly sand and sand, with a small area of gravelly sand. The wave height in the area ranges from 1.51 to 2.10 m.

The Cygnus field is located within the Dogger Bank Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is designated due to the presence of the Annex I habitat 'Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all the time', and the SNS SAC which is designated for harbour porpoise.

Low to moderate densities of harbour porpoise and white-beaked dolphin have been identified throughout the year. Low densities of minke whale and long-finned pilot whale have been recorded in the area throughout the year. The Cygnus field is 162 km offshore and therefore, grey and harbour seals may be encountered in low numbers.

Seabird oil sensitivity in the vicinity of the Cygnus field ranges from low to extremely high throughout the year.

The proposed operations will coincide with fish spawning and/or nursery activity for a number of commercial fish species.

The project area is primarily used for demersal and shellfish fishing and the fishing effort in the area is considered low.



There are several oil and gas fields nearby. The nearest marine cable is less than one kilometre away. The nearest renewable energy site is the Dogger Bank Offshore Wind Farm Project, located 14 km to the northwest. The Eni CCS license reference CS021 is located approximately 15 km east of the proposed operations. There are no known wrecks of historical importance or military activity within the vicinity of the proposed operations. Shipping density in the area is high.

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.

All the proposed activities will take place within the Cygnus Alpha Wellhead Platform 500-m safety zone and therefore impacts to other sea users due to physical presence are not expected.

There will be no discharges to sea as part of proposed operations.

There will be a permanent disturbance of the seabed as a result of driving the conductor into the seabed estimated at 0.0000005 km<sup>2</sup>. Seabed disturbance from locating the drilling rig has been considered under DR/2500/2. The area of seabed disturbed resulting from driving the conductor for the 44/12a- Slot 1 planned well represents 1.35E-11% of the SNS SAC and 4.05E-11% of the Dogger Bank SAC.

The permanent loss of seabed habitat will likely be contained within the 500-m zone of the Cygnus AWHP, which is already impacted by the oil and gas activity taking place within it. Therefore, the loss of this habitat is not expected to have a likely significant effect on neither the SNS SAC nor the Dogger Bank SAC.

In-combination permanent impacts on the Dogger Bank SAC seabed considering other plans and projects are estimated at 0.41% of the area and for the SNS SAC it is estimated at 0.12% of the area. The loss of habitat contributed by this project is considered very small in relation to the available habitat in the sites. The loss of habitat contributed by this project is also considered very small in relation to the combined effect of other projects. As such, significant cumulative impacts arising from this operation are not expected on the designated sites.

Underwater noise generated from conductor driving the is expected to cause a



permanent hearing shift in marine mammal hearing up to 33 m from the sound source and a behavioural disturbance up to 319 m from the sound source. The JNCC guidelines "Statutory nature conservation agency protocol for minimising the risk of injury to marine mammals from piling noise" will be adhered to. This includes the use of a marine mammal observer and passive acoustic monitoring. Further, conductor driving operations will be concluded by 31st March 2025 to prevent impacts in the SNS SAC summer area in the summer months. Therefore, any noise generated will not have a significant impact, and it is concluded that this project is not expected to have a likely significant effect on the site in relation to harbour porpoise and its supporting habitat and prey or other marine mammals.

Although not a planned activity, a worst-case major accident scenario resulting from well blowout was discussed in the application and deemed not possible as part of conductor-driving operations. The main risk associated with these operations is from a loss of diesel inventory resulting from a major collision. It is considered that the control and safety measures in place minimise the risk of a hydrocarbon 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.

Atmospheric emissions directly attributable to the planned activities are expected to rapidly disperse and are not likely to have a significant impact.

There are no expected transboundary effects from the operations. The nearest boundary (UK/Netherlands Median Line) is located approximately 36 km of the area of operations.

The cumulative impact arising from driving the conductor of the 44/12a- Slot 1 planned well have been shown to not be significant.

## **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**

Not Applicable.