

## **Section 10**

### **Mitigation and monitoring**

## 10 Mitigation and monitoring

As seen in the previous assessment sections, without any controls or mitigation, the proposed Draft Plan has the potential to impact the marine offshore environment in a number of ways. The exact nature of the impacts cannot be assessed in detail since this is a high level plan being considered at a regional level. Certain impacts (or data gaps) will be relatively easily mitigated through control measures (or data gathering), whilst for others this will not be the case. The mitigating measures first proposed for avoidance and/or reduction of the key environmental impacts assessed in Sections 7 and 8 are brought together below.

### 10.1 Seismic survey

#### 10.1.1 Noise generation

##### Existing measures

Reducing the noise entering the marine environment is the main measure in minimising the impacts of seismic survey operations. Subcontractor, vessel and equipment selection would be a part of this.

Operators are required to submit an Application for Approval to PAD to conduct any Geophysical or Other Exploration Survey, Site Survey or Route Survey prior to the planned commencement of the activity. Operators are required to ensure that current best industry practices for the environment are applied with regard to impact mitigation and monitoring measures in relation to marine mammals. Best practice guidelines have been proposed by the NPW to minimise potential impacts on marine mammals in Irish waters.

These guidelines require:

- a qualified and experienced MMO to be on the seismic vessel;
- that seismic operations should use the lowest practicable power levels throughout the survey and only discharge pressure waves into the marine environment when necessary;
- if marine mammals are present, seismic operations will be delayed until the animals move out of range. The power in the air guns will be built up slowly over at least 20 minutes (but no longer than 40 minutes) to give marine mammals adequate time to hear the noise and leave the vicinity. This 'soft' start process should be adopted every time air guns are used, even if no marine mammals are seen, and if air guns have stopped and not restarted after 5 minutes.

In the event that there is a requirement for multiple surveys in the same area and at the same time, it is advised these are combined into consecutive surveys through planning and co-operation with other operators and with the regulator. If surveys must be carried out simultaneously, consideration should be given to the location of surveys in relation to each other, so that marine mammals can avoid these areas where necessary and migration routes are not impeded.

##### Potential additional measures

The timing and location of cetacean calving and migrations should be considered when planning a seismic survey, and if possible avoided. This will have to be assessed at a later stage, on a case by case basis, as current knowledge of these sensitivities is very limited and is still developing. At present, SOSUS data have indicated the possibility of a winter migration to the south along the Rockall Basin for humpback whales in late winter or early spring (Charif & Clark, 2000), although there is no indication yet of any returning northward migration, and animals of the same species also appear to be present in the offshore area throughout the year.

As fish eggs and larvae are most at risk from the impacts of seismic activities, sensitive fish spawning areas should be avoided at known breeding times. On the basis of the increasingly dated information from Coull *et al* (1998), the most sensitive areas would be those used for spawning by herring during August and September along the coast of Donegal and Northern Ireland (Figure 5.13), which overlap into the Donegal Basin part of the IOSEA1 area. In addition, the slope seaward of the shelf break through the Slyne and Erris Basins (Figure 5.13) is a peak spawning area for both mackerel and blue whiting over the period April to June each year.

At present, guidelines for minimising survey impacts to cetaceans, such as those promulgated in the UK by JNCC, are followed on voluntary basis. In Ireland the NPW has issued a draft document *Mitigating Measures for Acoustic Surveys*. The NPW guidelines should be made a requirement for all seismic surveys and incorporated into the PAD Rules and Procedures (PAD, 2005a). These guidelines should be regularly reviewed as new scientific data emerges in order to ensure their credibility and

effectiveness. Best practice should also state that sufficient MMO personnel are available to cover shift working if appropriate. In addition, passive acoustic monitoring devices (PAM) could be deployed from the survey vessel to detect the presence and proximity of unseen cetaceans within the survey area, as long as this is deemed useful and appropriate by the relevant authorities and specialists. The use of passive acoustic monitoring devices (PAM) should be reviewed in a workshop by the relevant authorities, industry and specialists.

The impact of noise generated by seismic surveys on other users of the sea is generally not considered to be a significant issue, and is regulated through the normal process of notifying the appropriate authorities and liaising with the respective industry organisations where necessary.

### **10.1.2 Atmospheric emissions**

Under existing legislation, MARPOL Annex VI sets limits on sulphur oxide and nitrogen oxide emissions from ship exhausts and prohibits deliberate emissions of ozone depleting substances.

Annex VI prohibits deliberate emissions of ozone depleting substances, which include halons and chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). New installations containing ozone-depleting substances are prohibited on all ships.

Annex VI also sets limits on emissions of nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) from diesel engines. A mandatory NO<sub>x</sub> Technical Code, which defines how this shall be done, was adopted by the Conference under the cover of Resolution 2.

The Annex also prohibits the incineration onboard ship of certain products, such as contaminated packaging materials and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

Potential additional measures include the presumption of maximising fuel efficiency in the selection process for survey vessels, and ensuring the use of low sulphur fuel. Selection of a contractor with demonstrable planned preventative maintenance procedures will lead to fewer emissions and equipment failures. Finally, environmental awareness training at all levels within the operation will encourage best practice.

### **10.1.3 Physical presence**

Most of the mitigation measures here relate to existing control measures and best practice.

The oil and gas industry operators shall check in advance with the Maritime Safety Directorate, the MRCC of the Irish Coast Guard, and Sea Fisheries Control of the DCMNR that the proposed survey will not be carried out in an area and at a time that would conflict with legitimate shipping and fishing operations, including both floating and stationary gear, with consequential disruption of both such activities. In addition, in the case of a survey planned in an area of intensive fishing, discussions with Sea Fisheries Control of the DCMNR shall be initiated as early as possible, and, in any case, at least 45 days before the planned date in order that the implications can be fully considered. Marine Notices advertising such operations are published by the Marine Safety Directorate. Also marine navigation warnings are issued while the survey is taking place, for the duration of the survey.

In the event that there is a requirement for multiple surveys in the same area and at the same time, these should be combined through appropriate planning and co-operation between operators and regulator.

### **10.1.4 Accidental events**

The following are mitigation measures already in place as part of the PAD Rules and Procedures (PAD, 2005a).

Selection of a survey contractor with demonstrable planned preventative maintenance procedures will lead to fewer emissions and equipment failures. In addition, training of staff at all levels in environmental awareness will encourage best practice.

A full risk assessment should be performed as part of survey design.

Procedural controls, stemming from industry-standard guidelines and best practice procedures, will limit the possibility of accidental events. Quality procedures apply, incorporating the tenet of continuous improvement, and should be considered at the contractor selection stage.

## 10.2 Drilling

### 10.2.1 Noise generation

Depending on the type of facility and their moorings, it is known that certain drilling facilities generate more underwater noise than others, with drill ships and semi-submersibles operating on DP being the noisiest. The selection of drilling facility can, therefore, be used to reduce the amount of sound entering the marine environment. However, it is understood that the choice of drilling rig is generally dictated by other factors. The only other practical way of minimising the amount of noise entering the marine environment is by reducing the drilling time where possible.

Consideration should be given to the timing of drilling periods in relation to seasonal environmental sensitivities. In addition, the well design and engineering process should minimise the duration of drilling.

### 10.2.2 Disposal of drill cuttings and disturbance to sea bed

Impacts from drilling discharges are unlikely to be significant, but various mitigation measures are either required or can be taken by operators to further reduce impacts, as summarised below. The significance of impacts resulting from direct physical disturbance of the sea bed depends on the occurrence of key features of ecological or archaeological conservation importance in the immediate vicinity of operations.

#### Existing measures

- All chemicals used are regulated under the OSPAR HOCNF scheme and approved by use of a PUDAC (see Sections 3.3.4 and 3.3.5). Selection of all chemicals that may be used in drilling the proposed wells should be based upon both their technical specifications and their environmental performance, and the use of all chemicals minimised where practicable.
- Actual mud and chemical usage must be monitored during drilling operations, and subsequently reported to the PAD (see Sections 3.3.6 and 3.3.8).
- It is prohibited to discharge to sea cuttings contaminated with OBM or SBM.
- Best practice should be followed to minimise the amount of excess cement deposited on the sea bed.
- Mud recovery systems should be used, thus minimising the amount of drill fluids to be discharged.
- Site surveys are undertaken with regard to geohazards such as shallow gas, gas hydrates and slope instability.

#### Potential additional measures

- Consideration should be given to drilling slimhole wells (ie thinner than usual well bore) where beneficial. These generate fewer cuttings, require less drilling fluid and chemicals, and are generally faster than a conventional drilling programme. However, there are technical and operational difficulties with slim hole drilling that mean these are only feasible under certain conditions.
- Consideration should be given to requesting that modelling of the dispersion of discharged drill cuttings be undertaken for sensitive locations. This would necessitate collection of tidal stream information at different depths through the water column, depending on the overall water depth, and validation of the predictions once drilling was complete.
- As insufficient information is available on the precise occurrence and distribution of key habitats, megafaunal species and historic wreck sites, site-specific survey data will be required in order to assess the impacts resulting from direct disturbance during the installation and removal of drilling structures. This could be carried out as part of the site survey normally undertaken prior to all drilling activities. The PAD may require an environmental survey as part of the EAA approval process (see Section 3.3.7) and this should be carried out according to OSPAR guidelines. Careful consideration needs to be given to the design of such surveys, making use of non-destructive survey methods where appropriate.
- For areas known to be close to or within likely herring spawning grounds, particularly around the breeding period of August and September, a herring spawning ground assessment survey should take place prior to drilling to ensure that impacts to valued herring spawning habitat are avoided.
- Best practice should be followed in order to limit dragging of anchors and chains.
- The proposed works should be subject to a detailed underwater archaeological impact assessment in advance, and this should follow the format detailed in guidelines being developed on *Acquisition and interpretation of geophysical data for archaeological assessment during oil industry geophysical route and site surveys in water depths exceeding 50 m* (Quinn, 2005). Any

shipwrecks or objects of potential archaeological interest should be reported to the Director of the National Museum of Ireland within 4 days. If wreckage found is more than 100 years old, the Underwater Archaeology Unit and the Garda Síochána must also be notified within 4 days.

### 10.2.3 Atmospheric emissions

The main sources of atmospheric emissions from drilling activity will be from fuel use and from well testing or flaring of produced hydrocarbons.

In terms of fuel use, measures can be taken from an early stage to include fuel efficiency in the selection process for drilling rigs, support ships and helicopters, and to use low sulphur fuel for example. Such steps could be required through the national legislative and policy framework, as driven by, for example, the European Union strategy to reduce the contribution of shipping to acidification, ground-level ozone, eutrophication, health, climate change and ozone depletion (European Commission, 2006).

With regard to well testing, emissions may also be influenced by careful selection of drilling rig and contractors and by the use of maximum efficiency 'green' burners (in the case of oil or condensate wells). The amount of fuel flared can also be minimised by appropriate design of the test programme. If appropriate, well testing systems that do without the need for flaring at all can be built into the test programme.

### 10.2.4 Physical presence

At the time of submitting a well plan for approval, operators are obliged to inform fishermen by means of the established Irish Offshore Operators Association (IOOA) procedures. In addition, in the case of a well planned in an area of intensive fishing, discussions with the Sea Fisheries Control Division of the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources must be initiated as early as possible, and in any case at least 90 days before planned commencement of drilling. Procedures are in place between IOOA members and the fishing industry to resolve possible disputes over damaged equipment.

In the event of a well being suspended, over-trawlable protection should be put in place in areas most used for demersal fishing activities.

### 10.2.5 Accidental events

The following are mitigation measures already in place as part of the PAD Rules and Procedures (PAD, 2005a).

- Selection of a drilling contractor with demonstrable planned preventative maintenance procedures will lead to fewer emissions and equipment failures. In addition, training of staff at all levels in environmental awareness will encourage best practice.
- A full risk assessment should be performed as part of well design and engineering.
- The potential for shallow gas should be identified and minimised by site survey prior to drilling.
- The BOP is installed to prevent gas blowout once drilling has progressed beyond the riserless stage.
- Gas detection systems are installed on mud shakers to give early indication of any potential for gas blowout.
- Training in safety awareness and response procedures for drilling crews will ensure that the risk of a blowout will be minimised, and be able to make the appropriate response should one occur.
- Procedural (permit to work, drilling and bunkering practices etc) and engineering controls (blowout preventers, choke and kill lines etc) will limit the possibility of accidental events.
- An approved OSCP is required in advance of approval for drilling. This is designed to assist the decision-making process during an oil spill, indicate what resources are required to combat the spill, minimise any further discharges and mitigate its effects. It should conform to PAD guidelines.

## 10.3 Monitoring

The DoEHLG Guidelines for implementation of the SEA Directive describe the requirement to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the Final Adopted Plan. The primary purpose of monitoring is to cross check significant environmental effects which arise during the implementation stage against those predicted during the plan preparation stage. The Directive leaves considerable flexibility as how monitoring shall be arranged. However, monitoring should concentrate on the likely significant effects that have been identified in the environmental report and the mitigative measures that have been proposed. Monitoring should ensure that the level of activities and

subsequent impacts will be consistent with the scenarios developed within this report. This will enable identification by PAD of unforeseen impacts at an early stage and to take appropriate remedial action. The types of monitoring can therefore be thought of at two levels; monitoring the activity levels, and monitoring the impacts of the activities.

### 10.3.1 Monitoring activity levels

The oil and gas exploration and appraisal activities resulting from implementation of the PAD's Final Adopted Plan for the current Frontier Licensing Round will be monitored by the PAD. This is to ensure the delivery of exploration commitments made by operators in the agreed work programmes at the time of licensing. An activity scenario has been developed by the PAD for IOSEA1 as a basis for impact assessment. Actual activity levels over the area will therefore need to be compared with predicted levels, in order to monitor the basis for the conclusions in the Environmental Report.

A 6-monthly report is prepared by the PAD for the government, in line with other sectors, that summarises the activities of the oil and gas industry in Ireland, including a list of current licenses, consents issued, wells drilled and surveys undertaken. This could be developed as the basis for the required monitoring of activity levels, and to confirm activity levels are in line with those predicted.

### 10.3.2 Monitoring the impacts of activities

As detailed in Article 10 of the SEA Directive, Member States shall monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of plans and programmes in order to identify at an early stage unforeseen adverse effects and to be able to undertake appropriate remedial action.

The licensing authority should ensure that an appropriate monitoring programme be devised for evaluating the environmental impacts and efficacy of mitigation measures relating to the key potential environmental issues that were identified as significant in Section 6, Table 6.4 of this report. This should be carried out in consultation with appropriate statutory bodies and specialists.

The licensing authority (PAD) will ensure that appropriate best practice guidelines where required are developed and implemented in consultation with other statutory authorities and relevant specialists.

The current Rules and Procedures for Offshore Petroleum Exploration and Appraisal Operations ('Rules and Procedures') are set out in accordance with the provisions of the Petroleum and Other Minerals Development Act, 1960 (no 7 of 1960), as applied by the Continental Shelf Act, 1968 (no 14 of 1968), as amended and pursuant to the Licensing Terms for Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration and Development, 1992 ('1992 Terms'). These are laid out in the *Rules and Procedures Manual for Offshore Petroleum Exploration and Appraisal Operations* (PAD, 2005a). PAD approval is required before commencement of certain operations, and such PAD approval may be dependent on prior satisfaction of the specific requirements of other responsible Departments, Agencies and Authorities.

A fuller outline of these procedures is given in Section 3, but provisions are in place for monitoring emissions and discharges, consent auditing, and for undertaking baseline studies and post-drilling impacts monitoring. Operators must report on compliance with legislation, progress made in achieving environmental goals and continual improvement in environmental performance.

In its role as regulator of the offshore oil and gas industry, the PAD is served by a number of agencies including the Marine Institute which carry out activities in relation to environmental monitoring:

- Provides advice on technical and scientific aspects of monitoring programmes for offshore installations and points of discharge.
- Examines the results of monitoring programmes.
- Assesses the chemicals/substances proposed for use in drilling, maintenance and production, in accordance with OSPAR Harmonised Mandatory Control System (HMCS).
- Assesses data from HOCNF.
- Advises oil and gas companies directly on alternative chemicals/substances for use in cases where potential environmental damage is deemed excessive.
- Provides observations on applications for surveys etc.
- Compiles data for the annual OSPAR report on discharges spills and emissions from offshore oil and gas installations.
- Plans for future drilling rig and production platform inspections for compliance monitoring and use of chemicals.

It is recommended that the PAD consult with relevant bodies including the Marine Institute in order to review the environmental monitoring framework in light of the IOSEA1 assessment.