

The second-half slog...

The UKCS drilling activity level has increased by a single well in the last month and nine mobile rigs - 4 semisubmersibles, 4 jackups and one drillship are currently active in the sector. So far this year 15 wells have spudded and a further 7 sidetracks have been initiated bringing the tally to 22 wells. Breaking this down shows this figure to comprise 6 exploration spuds and a sidetrack and 9 appraisal spuds and 6 sidetracks.

23 production and development wells are currently active, excluding workovers, but inclusive of batch drilling programmes such as that ongoing at the Huntington (Palaeocene) Field. Half of the current development wells are being drilled using mobile units.

In the West of Shetland area four mobile units are active, double last month. Chevron abandoned Well 217/15-1Z after 156 days in the sidetrack leg (267 days in total) before the Stena Carron drillship moved to spud Cambo appraisal, Well 204/10a-4, on 29 June.

In the shallower waters (500ft) over the Clair Ridge, BP continues operations on southwest Clair Field appraisal Well 206/12a-3, which spudded on 9 June with the semisubmersible Byford Dolphin. A few miles to the northeast and on trend with Clair, Faroe Petroleum commenced its first operated UKCS drilling programme on 7 July with the spudding of Well 206/5a-3 on the Fulla Prospect, also targeting Clair sands and employing Awilco's semisubmersible WilPhoenix (formerly the 1983-built Transocean vessel Arctic II). Total has re-entered its Edradour Discovery, Well 206/4-2, which was suspended on 22 December 2010, to conduct a DST programme.

In the Northern North Sea the Sedco 714 completed abandonment operations on Total's Oban Prospect, Well 3/15a-14, following a DST programme conducted during a lengthy stay at total depth. The rig moved to the West of Shetland area to re-enter the company's Edradour Discovery.

Nautical has commenced a further phase of appraisal drilling on Kraken with the spudding of Well 9/2b-5 on 6 July. The programme, utilising the second of two Awilco's rigs, the WilHunter, the former Transocean Arctic IV, built in 1982, includes an initial pilot hole to be followed by a horizontal sidetrack. The well is aimed at proving commerciality at Kraken and if successful will be completed for future production.

Just two rigs are currently active on E&A duties in the Central North Sea. Both are long-running HPHT operations. Maersk's second geological sidetrack, Well 22/25a-10Y on the Culzean accumulation remains ongoing with the jackup Ensco 101, which has been on location since June 2010, whilst BG's Jackdaw appraisal, Well 30/2a-8, with jackup Gorilla VI, will reach its first anniversary on location early in August.

Maersk's Courageous appraisal, Well 30/2a-9Z, drilled by the Noble Ton van Langeveld semisubmersible was 32 days in sidetrack including 26 days at total depth. A test of the Palaeocene reservoir to establish flow rates would be no surprise. The rig moved a short distance to commence development drilling duties on the Janice Field.

Nexen's Hobby North appraisal, Well 14/26a-9, using the Transocean Prospect was abandoned on 21 July after 35 days. No geological sidetrack ensued. The well's location – a long stepout to Hobby North – has contributed to the "tightholed" status.

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The logo for Hannon Westwood, consisting of a solid blue square with the company name in white text.

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Activity in the Southern North Sea has doubled – to two wells – since the last report. The Ensco 80 jackup continues operations on Tullow's Well 44/19b-7A on the Carboniferous Cameron Prospect, whilst E.On has spudded Well 42/28d-12 on the Rotliegendes Tolmount Prospect in what amounts to a third attempt (initially by Dana) to drill the former Scolty Prospect. Initially rig problems manifested Dana's operation whilst drilling issues in the Jurassic impacted E.On's subsequent attempt. The current well is sited, hopefully to avoid the challenging horizon.

The first half of 2011, from an exploration and appraisal drilling perspective, was woefully poor, yet in the last month there have been four new spuds. With four drilling units, the West of Shetland arena is now the most active sector in the UK from an E&A perspective. It can be a fool's venture predicting the oil price, and in the current environment suggesting how E&A activity levels might look in the UK sector come the end of 2011 is equally risky. That said, perhaps 15-20 E&A wells should commence in the second half, if a variety of indicators and not solely DECC PON notifications are anything to go by, with the boost in spuds perhaps early indications of this promised pick up in activity.