

Well Slot - March 2011

E&A spuds on the UKCS in the first two months of the year amount to 3 exploration wells and 3 appraisal wells. Ten E&A wells are currently active, all utilising mobile rigs; 5 exploration wells and 5 appraisal wells. Additionally, 15 development/production wells are ongoing from 5 platform rigs and a further 10 mobile units.

The numbers of active wells in all three categories are also up on last month and the E&A picture shows an improvement on this time last year when just 5 mobile rigs were drilling 2 exploration and 3 appraisal wells. As a point of caution, the active E&A pool, whilst just four units short of the 14 rigs active at the end of February in that strong year of 2008, was running at 10 units just prior to the downturn of 2009. The current climate, however, feels more positive.

Two wells are now active in the Northern North Sea, with the spudding of Sterling's Cladhan appraisal well 210/30a-4 by semisubmersible Transocean Prospect and Total's ongoing operation on Oban Prospect well 3/15a-14 with the Sedco 714 semi.

In the deep waters West of Shetland, Chevron's Lagavulin Prospect well 217/15-1, with drill ship Stena Carron, remains the sole E&A well.

In the Central North Sea 5 wells are active. Centrica spudded well 21/17a-6 on the ex-Venture Whitethroat Prospect with semisub Noble Ton van Langeveld, Maersk continues with the sidetrack on Culzean HPHT appraisal well 22/25a-10 with jackup Ensco 101, and EnCore most recently spudded the latest in its Catcher area programme with well 28/9-4 using jackup Galaxy II on the multi-objective Burgman Prospect. As well as Maersk's HPHT appraisal, other carry-overs in the CNS from 2010 are BG's Jackdaw appraisal well 30/2a-8 with jackup Rowan Gorilla VI and Talisman's Josephine appraisal well 30/13a-9 with semi Ocean Princess.

As the only E&A well operation completed in February, EnCore's Catcher North appraisal well 28/9-3, also drilled by Galaxy II, was abandoned as an oil well after 23 days.

In the gas sector, jackup Ensco 72, drilling RWE's East Breagh appraisal well 42/13a-6, has been joined by jackup Ensco 80 to drill the Rotliegendes Grian Prospect for Sterling with well 48/28b-2.

Of the 2010 carry-overs still active on the UKCS, positive outcomes are anticipated at least from BG's Jackdaw, Maersk's Culzean and Talisman's Josephine appraisals.

Indications are that the rig market is tightening and rates are likely to firm upwards, in part driven by a requirement for mobile units on development drilling operations. A number of firm near-term E&A plans are confirmed, but those operators wavering could feel the squeeze.

Hannon Westwood's forecast well pool currently stands at 200 E&A wells, over 60% of which are exploration prospects likely to see the drill bit over the next four years with half of these in the Central North Sea.