

**Crosby Exploration Well 110/14-F
ES Web Comments**

ES Title: **Crosby Exploration Well 110/14-F**
Operator: **Burlington Resources**
ES Report No: **W/829/1999**
ES Date: **April 2000**
Block Nos: **110/14-F**

Synopsis:

Burlington Resources (Irish Sea) Ltd (BRIS) is proposing to drill and potentially test an exploration well in the eastern Irish Sea, in a water depth of 20 metres approximately 16km off the coast of Lancashire, to assess the extent and nature of hydrocarbon reserves thought to exist in that area. Drilling, was to be undertaken from the jack-up rig ENSCO 72, originally scheduled to be undertaken between July and November 2000, and expected to last for 15 days. Since submission of the ES, BRIS has indicated a delay in the drilling schedule, now expected to be early in 2001. It proposes to drill a vertical slim hole with a target depth of 1,384 metres. All drilling will involve the use of Water Based Muds (WBM), resulting discharge to sea of 300 tonnes of cuttings with associated mud.

The environmental description in the original ES provided a summary of most parameters but the descriptions of coastal habitats (especially bird life) were very brief, despite the inevitable expected concerns of local environmental interests. The ES identified three routine activities as presenting 'transient' impact on the environment:

physical presence and consequent potential interference with fisheries and shipping during drilling operations;

discharge of water-based drilling mud and cuttings

atmospheric emissions from power generation on drilling rig and support vessels and well testing (if undertaken).

With the well location close to the shoreline, the risk of hydrocarbon spillage (although considered low) is expected to be the main concern of environmental bodies. The ES gave a general overview of oil spill response strategies. BRIS recognised that potential impacts from oil spillage will be affected by temporal changes in sensitivity, most notably from seabirds, shore birds and the tourist season. The ES had suggested that bird sensitivity was greatest towards the end of the originally proposed drilling window, therefore they had decided not to undertake well testing if drilling had taken place in October or November. The DTI had some concern regarding the presentation of data on coastal bird populations and their vulnerability to oil pollution and clarification sought.

A major weakness of the ES was the lack of discussion of any consultation process. Consultation is vital to the EA process, and is an important recommendation identified under the Guidelines to the Offshore Petroleum Production and Pipelines (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations

Consultees:

The MAFF and the JNCC reviewed the ES. The MAFF identified no significant problem with the ES and recommended approval. The JNCC (31 May 2000) expressed concern at a number of issues, primarily those relating the presentation of data on coastal bird populations and their vulnerability to oil pollution. It also asked for more information on the impact of discharged cuttings and potential cumulative effects along with other operations in the Liverpool Bay area.

BRIS responded (27 July 2000) to concerns expressed by both the DTI and JNCC, particularly regarding the level of consultation and oil spill risks to coastal bird populations.

Meetings were arranged by the DTI involving BRIS, DTI, JNCC and both English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales. After discussion of the key issues originally raised through the JNCC and responded to by BRIS, several concerns were still being expressed, particularly with regard the potential risk of a blow-out and also the need for BRIS to undertake new spill modelling and seasonal sensitivity studies if it planned to move drilling into 2001, probably early in the year with intended dates not given.

After ongoing discussion, English Nature in particular remained concerned regarding spill risk from bunkering and from the extremely unlikely event of a blow-out (of oil). BRIS provided additional written response (18th September), focusing on oil spill risk and vulnerability of coastal birds, providing 3 attachments, including further environmental information and results of new oil spill modelling. In a letter of 6th October, English Nature indicated disappointment that a confirmed date for drilling was not given, but stated that the additional information provided by BRIS confirmed that measures would be in place to minimise risk to wildlife in the event of an oil spill.

Recommendation:

Based on the information presented within the ES it is recommended that approval should be given.