

Information

for County Councillors

Sheet Number:
2013-17/179

From:	Sarah Winfield, Planning Policy Officer
Date:	16 th September 2015
To:	All County Councillors

14th onshore oil and gas licensing round

Q: What is a Petroleum Exploration and Development Licence (PEDL) for onshore oil and gas?

A: PEDLs offer licence holders exclusive rights within a licence area (usually 10km²) to explore for oil or gas, including shale gas. *(In order to pursue any proposal for oil and gas development within a licensed area, the license holder will be required to follow existing planning and regulatory processes, i.e., in applying for planning permission and relevant environment permits, to gain consent drill from the Oil and Gas Authority (OGA).)*

The Oil and Gas Authority (OGA), which is an executive agency of the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC)¹, is responsible for issuing time-limited Petroleum Exploration and Development Licences (PEDLs). This is done from time to time in licensing rounds, with the previous round of PEDLs expiring in 2014.

Q: What were the results of the 14th Onshore PEDL round?

A: OGA received 95 licence applications from the 14th licensing round (which closed in October 2014), covering 295 block areas in England, Scotland and Wales. Following reviews of geotechnical analysis, scrutiny of the operator competency, financial viability, capacity and environmental awareness (and following the decision not to award licences in Scotland and Wales), this was reduced to 159 blocks for further consideration.

On 18 August 2015, OGA announced the first group of onshore blocks from the 14th Onshore Licensing Round to be formally offered to companies (these offers do not yet constitute licenses). **None of these 27 blocks is in Somerset.**

A second group of 132 further blocks has been subjected to detailed assessment under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, the findings of which are

¹ The Oil and Gas Authority (OGA) is an executive agency of the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC), responsible for regulating offshore and onshore oil and gas operations in the UK, including: licensing; exploration and production; and infrastructure.

now out for consultation. This detailed assessment (termed an “Appropriate Assessment” as part of the Habitat Regulations Assessment) was carried out on the blocks that were considered likely to have such an effect on a European site.²

Subject to the outcome of this consultation, OGA plans to announce offers for this second group of blocks later in the year.

From initial review, 10 of these 132 blocks are wholly or partially in Somerset (two of which cross in to Wiltshire and two cross in to North Somerset). **The attached map shows these blocks in more detail.**

Q: How has Somerset County Council been involved in this process so far?

A: Somerset County Council responded to a DECC consultation on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for further onshore oil and gas licencing rounds in March 2014, raising concerns about the approach being taken and highlighting the need for central government to be clear about constraints that would make a location inappropriate for oil and gas development. DECC’s responses to this SEA consultation are available to download from the .gov website (link [here](#)).

Particular locational constraints for the blocks subject to the Appropriate Assessment that are wholly or partially in Somerset include: flood risk; international protection under the Ramsar convention³; and proximity to a nuclear power station (Hinkley Point).

The Somerset Minerals Plan (adopted February 2015) includes a section on energy minerals that contains an oil and gas development policy. This provides the criteria against which any theoretical proposal would be determined, alongside other relevant policies in the Development Plan.

Q: What are the next steps for Somerset County Council in this process?

A: The current consultation is open until 29th September. The OGA will then consider results of the consultation before offering any further blocks. The licences for all offered blocks will be granted after the terms and conditions have been finalised.

Somerset County Council will respond to the consultation, having reviewed the information provided by DECC/OGA, and liaised as appropriate with neighbouring Mineral Planning Authorities and relevant District Planning Authorities in Somerset.

End

For more information please contact:	Name: Sarah Winfield or Guy Robinson Email: stwinfield@somerset.gov.uk Tel No.: 01823 359404 Or Email: grobinson@somerset.gov.uk Tel No.: 01823 359402
--------------------------------------	--

² The Habitats Regulations provide for certain protections to be accorded to designated sites, including Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Sites of Community Importance (SCI), designated under the Habitats Directive, and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the Birds Directive. UK planning policy also accords the same level of protection to sites listed or proposed under The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, called the Ramsar Convention, and to possible/proposed SPAs and candidate SACs. Collectively, all of these sites are referred to in DECC’s latest report as “European sites”.

³ The Convention on Wetlands, called the Ramsar Convention, is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

14th PEDL Round - Areas in Somerset subject to Appropriate Assessment AUGUST 2015

