

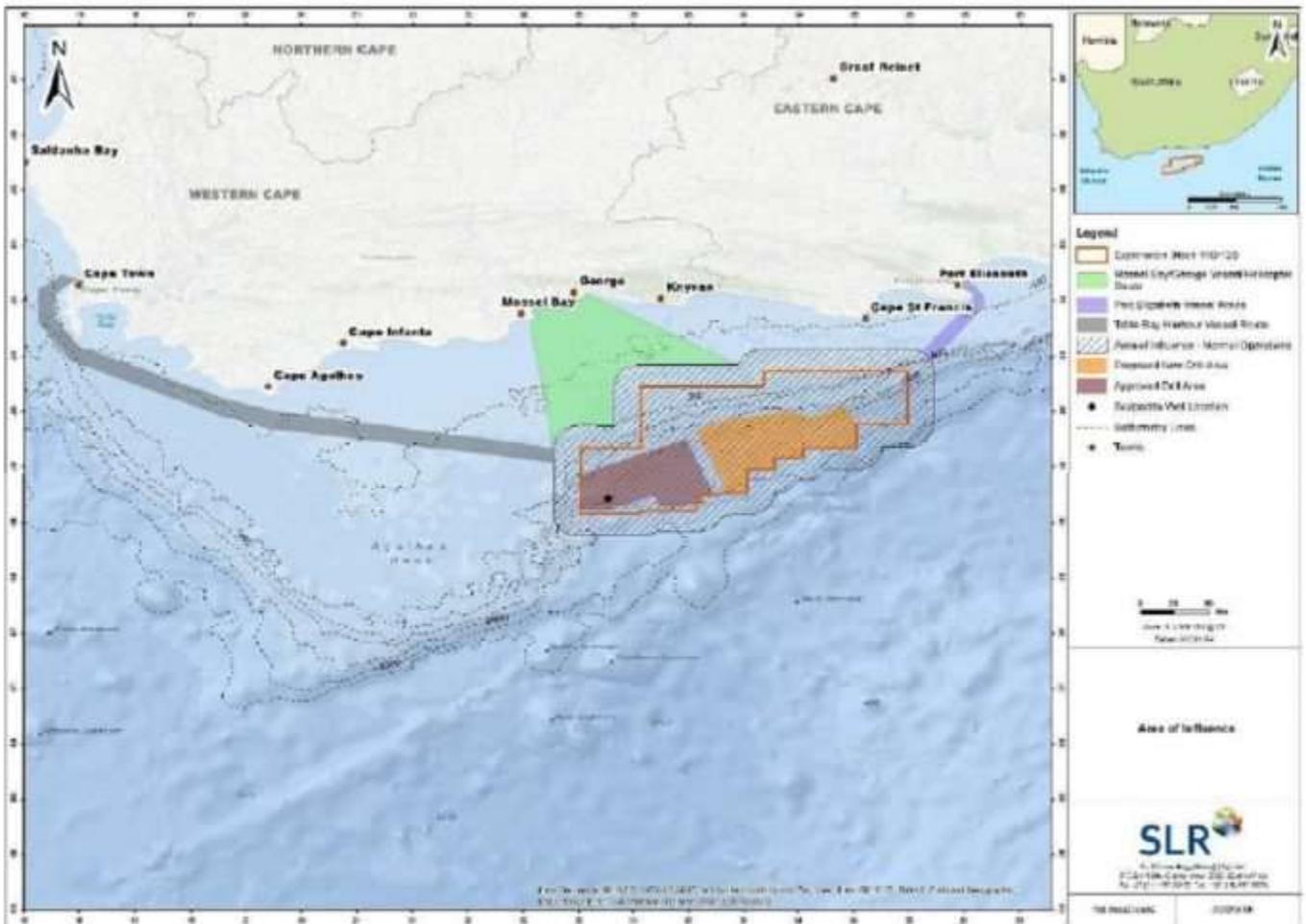
Keep Watch. Exploration Activities to Impact Fishing

By
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Total exploration areas of influence during normal operations. Source: Draft Scoping Report

The commercial fishing industry should look really closely at how it could potentially be impacted by proposed exploration activities off the south coast of South Africa.

The [Draft Scoping Report](#) for the proposed additional exploration drilling and

associated activities in Block 11B/12B off the south coast, is in the public domain.

It was released by SLR Consulting (South Africa) Pty Ltd on 19 June and can be viewed for a period of 60 days to 21 August 2020. SLR Consulting (South Africa) Pty Ltd is the company appointed to undertake a full scoping and Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) process.

TOTAL E & P South Africa B.V. (TEPSA) is the operator of Licence Block 11B/12B and the main shareholder (45%) with Qatar Petroleum International Upstream LLC (25%); CNR International (South Africa) (20%) and Main Street 1549 (Pty) Ltd. (10%).

The northern boundary of the block is located between about 130 km and 45 km offshore of Mossel Bay and Cape St. Francis, respectively. The licence block is 18734 km² in extent and water depths range from roughly 110 m to 2300 m.

TEPSA holds an existing Exploration Right and Environmental Authorisation (EA) which allows for the undertaking of several exploration activities. These include two-dimensional (2D) and three dimensional (3D) seismic surveys, sonar bathymetry surveys and sediment sampling across the entire extent of Block 11B/12.

In 2018/2019 drilling of the Brulpadda exploration well was completed. This drilling operation was successful, yielding a significant gas condensate discovery. Due to this success, TEPSA is now proposing to undertake further exploration drilling and associated activities.

Impact on fisheries

An Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) must be completed first before further exploratory drilling can take place. This activity could potentially affect commercial fishing activity.

The current application includes the drilling of up to 10 additional exploration wells in a proposed new drill area in the eastern portion of the block. It also includes Controlled Source Electro-Magnetic Surveys (CSEM) to profile the presence of hydrocarbon resources; and the deployment of metocean buoys for data acquisition and acoustic monitoring.

Fish disturbance from the CSEM surveys is likely as well as the possible fishing exclusion from the proposed 500m to 2km operational safety zones around the drilling unit.

There will also be increased underwater noise disturbance from drilling, the likelihood of wellheads abandoned on the seafloor, and accidental oil spills during normal operations.

Although TEPSA say it is unlikely, it is possible there could be an event such as a large blow-out.

How the issue will be addressed in the ESIA is to commission a commercial fisheries assessment. This will determine the fishing effort and catch of all fisheries operating off the coast of South Africa in relation to the licence area.

It will also assess the impact that the proposed project will have on these sectors during normal drilling operations and upset conditions (small accidental spills and large blow-out).

The commercial fisheries assessment, as undertaken for the marine fauna assessment, will use the findings of both the drill cuttings and oil spill modelling study and underwater noise assessment to assess the potential impact on commercial fish from drilling activities.

Information feedback meetings will be held in Mossel Bay, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth should this be allowed for under any COVID-19 restrictions that may be in place at the time.

Alternatively, virtual meetings will be held. Three meetings are planned with potential and registered interested and affected parties (I&APs) who wish to attend; the commercial fishing sector; and the Agulhas Offshore Forum.

What you specifically want to read is [Chapter 7: Description of the Affected Environment](#). Its 116-pages of detailed information about the physical, biological and socio-economic environment likely to be affected by the proposed exploration activities.

Resistance

Resistance to the project is building as environmentalists gear up to comment on the project. They have been highly critical of the public participation process held earlier this month calling the session “nothing more than a one-way transmission”.

“It is clear that SLR and Total have plotted dirty tricks to muffle people’s rights to a fair and equitable public participation process in Minister Mantashe’s push for petroleum,” says Groundwork.

https://www.groundwork.org.za/archives/2020/news20200718-Total_puts_Public_Participation_on_Mute.php

Environmentalists say the Brulpadda deep water find is being hyped as the energy discovery that could help transform the South African economy. That it will act as a ‘bridge fuel’ to wean the country off its dependence on coal power.

“However, the expansion of any form of hydrocarbon resource, faced as we are with catastrophic climate breakdown, is unconscionable,” they say.

They point to the extreme weather patterns, climate change and the need to phase out fossil fuels in favour of clean renewable energy rather than oil and gas exploration.

Furthermore, that “little account is being taken in respect of the environmental impacts and high risks of being situated in an area notorious for the severity of its weather, and where 30 metre waves are capable of sinking even large ships.”

“This dynamic ocean system also contributes to the high biodiversity of South Africa’s marine ecosystems and the exploration site is close to a Marine Protected Area: <https://www.marineprotectedareas.org.za/explore>

Seismic surveys

“Studies have shown that seismic surveys increase noise levels to twice the normal level and severely impact marine life. Indeed, more and more scientists agree that such surveys disturb the communication, navigation and eating habits essential to the survival of marine life.

“These sonic waves can also damage fish with air bladders, destroy marine wildlife eggs and larvae, and incite fish and other marine species to migrate from the affected area. This inevitably threatens the health of regional fisheries and risks the livelihoods of those who depend on the ocean for their survival.”

Making Waves. Likely Effects of Seismic Surveys on the Squid Resource and Fishery

Lastly, they say that an industrial disaster or damage because of a weather-related event that results in condensate escaping in any form, makes for a highly toxic event that will be dangerous to the environment, animals and humans.

