



AGR Petroleum Services operates the first offshore well in the Bay of Biscay for France's largest onshore oil producer.

CHALLENGE

AGR Petroleum Services was awarded the contract to provide well management services for an exploration well on the Aquitaine Maritime Permit offshore France in the Bay of Biscay. This was the first time ever that the client had elected to use an independent well management company.

Complicating Factors

- A short drilling window provided by the French military authorities.
- Moving a rig from the North Sea to the Bay of Biscay and back as part of a multi-client programme.
- An exploration well with a high degree of geological uncertainty and limited offset information.
- A limited local oilfield infrastructure and services, with no offshore drilling in the last ten years.
- Rig availability in a tight rig market.

RESULT

AGR contracted the "Byford Dolphin" semi-sub for a multi-well multi-operator campaign in 2007. This enabled AGR to secure rig access for the client and meet the drilling window restrictions by offering the client the first drilling slot on the campaign in the summer of 2007. AGR was able to offer the client a highly-skilled well management team (both onshore and offshore) and an experienced materials/logistics team to plan and manage this complex operation.

AGR was able to organise the drilling sequence so that the client could drill their well first, thereby working within the available military window. AGR managed to incorporate this into the drilling campaign without adversely impacting the remaining operator participants.

Geological assessments were made together with the client's in-house team. This resulted in some well design changes in order to provide the required design contingency to handle the exploration uncertainties and also to reduce the amount of equipment that would need to be mobilised.

The rig tow from the North Sea was optimised by loading drilling equipment on the rig while under tow near Aberdeen, and by using two anchor handler vessels for combined tow, anchor handling and logistics duties.

All port, helicopter and other logistics services in France were contracted by AGR. An emergency response plan and supporting facilities were put in place at the Biscay logistics base.

This realised the following benefits:

- The well was drilled within the required authority time frame.
- Full compliance with all French regulations associated with drilling in this area.
- A complex logistical operation was successfully managed in a remote location.
- Geological uncertainties were managed effectively.
- Exploration results were delivered.

AGR Petroleum Services
Karenslyst allé 4
P.O. Box 444 Skøyen
NO - 0213 OSLO
Norway

T: +47 24 06 10 00
E: petroleum.services@agr.com

www.agr.com



TECHNICAL NOTES

From the outset the main challenges associated with the well concerned the remote location and the lack of oilfield-related facilities in the area. In conjunction with the client, AGR was able to set up and operate a logistics base in Verdon-sur-Mer in order to serve the rig while it was operating in the Bay of Biscay. This proved extremely challenging as the port had never been set up to act as an offshore rig support base, and local working practices/procedures provided no flexibility for working shifts at short notice/in evenings/at weekends etc. as is required during drilling operations. As well as the supply base, AGR also organised the set-up of a heliport in order to transport personnel to and from the rig. The Belgian helicopter operator NHV was mobilised to the aerodrome in Soulac-sur-Mer where personnel were rotated to/from the rig. The AGR logistics teams based in Aberdeen and Verdon-sur-Mer successfully managed the complex logistical operation through effective planning and coordination, and ensured that the rig was always well served throughout the project.

The well had a strong exploration element. Together with the client, AGR engineers worked on reservoir pressure scenarios, performed a kick potential analysis and reviewed the available offset information. The exploration uncertainties were identified, and design options were analysed using P1™, AGR's proprietary probabilistic well time, risk management and cost estimating software. As no wells had been drilled in the area for ten years, AGR engineers transferred their extensive North Sea knowledge and experience to the project. A design was selected that enabled the exploration risks to be cost-effectively managed, and a programme developed to allow the client to achieve all of their well objectives.

The end result of the extensive planning and diligent operations was a successful well for the client and the first oil well drilled offshore France in over ten years.

KEY ENABLERS

- Access to a rig during a tight rig market
- A flexible well sequence to manage drilling-window constraints imposed by the French military authorities
- Access to an integrated team of technical professionals both onshore and offshore
- The set-up and management of a remote logistics base and heliport in France using an experienced and capable logistics team.

KEYWORDS

Bay of Biscay, offshore France, remote operations, Byford Dolphin, exploration drilling



Verdon-sur-Mer supply base

AGR Petroleum Services
Karenslyst allé 4
P.O. Box 444 Skøyen
NO - 0213 OSLO
Norway

T: +47 24 06 10 00
E: petroleum.services@agr.com

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