

**The Ultra-Deepwater Advisory Committee**  
Advisory Committee to The Secretary of Energy

December 16, 2013

The Honorable Ernest Moniz, PhD.  
Secretary of Energy  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20585

***RE: 2014 Draft Annual Plan  
Findings and Recommendations***

Dear Mr. Secretary:

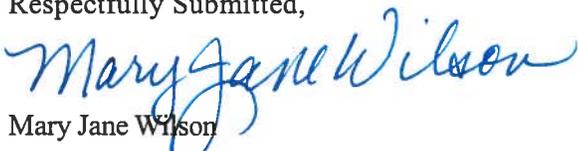
On behalf of the Ultra-Deepwater Advisory Committee (UDAC), I am pleased to submit for your consideration our final comments on proposed elements within the 2014 Draft Annual Plan. While pursuing the strategic planning process, UDAC encouraged all participants to give a high priority to ensuring Health and Safety through technological advancement. The results of the research and the recommendations for further research are applicable to all levels of exploration and production, not just Ultra Deepwater.

The UDW Program recommends that the research funded by Section 999:

1. Continue to completion of the defined goals of the awarded contracts;
2. Continue to focus future efforts on human behavior and risk reduction in hazardous environments;
3. Continue to reduce risk of contamination through technological improvements in design, monitoring, and containment during all aspects of exploration, production, and abandonment in UDW, and;
4. Disseminate the results to all stakeholders.

On behalf of the UDAC I want to extend our thanks to the Secretary and respectfully request that we be kept apprised of any progress or any future need for our support or assistance.

Respectfully Submitted,



Mary Jane Wilson  
Ultra-Deepwater Advisory Committee Chair

**ULTRA-DEEP WATER ADVISORY COMMITTEE FINDINGS AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS 2014**

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## Research and Development Program Committee

The R&D Program Subcommittee of the UDAC notes that the *2014 Annual Plan* has continued to take into account safety and environment in several aspects of the proposed program. This program is nearly complete and therefore the *2014 Annual Plan* represents a slight modification of the *2013 Annual Plan*. Acknowledging that it is late in the program, we still wish to stress the importance of the emphasis on safety into the future. Also, we feel it is important to highlight gaps in the current research program.

The Program Subcommittee is largely in agreement with the suggestions for research topics contained in the *2014 Annual Plan*. In the UDAC report on the *2012 and 2013 Annual Plans*, there was acknowledgement that there has been an overall redirection of research topics towards safety and accident prevention. The *2014 Annual Plan* reflects this redirection of research as well. In last year's recommendation, the Program Subcommittee stressed there should be more emphasis on the importance of human factors relating to safety and environmental issues. To date, there is one approved project, (RPSEA 11121-5101-01), analyzing the human factors related to safety. This positive effort by RPSEA is acknowledged and should be encouraged in the complementary research programs within the National Energy Technology Laboratory (NETL) and Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL).

Traditionally, the research program has focused on technical issues, and the expert advice helping guide the program has come from physical scientists and engineers. We encourage input from experts on human behavior in hazardous operating conditions. The National Commission Report to the President found:<sup>1</sup>

- " ... As a result of our investigation, we conclude:
- *The explosive loss of the Macondo well could have been prevented;*
  - *The immediate causes of the Macondo well blowout can be traced to a series of identifiable mistakes made by BP, Halliburton, and Transocean that reveal such systematic failures in risk management that they place in doubt the safety culture of the entire industry."*

That is, the Macondo incident was primarily the result of human failure, requiring more emphasis on this factor by the research program.

A first action could be to establish an expert in the occupational behavioral sciences and have this person survey what is already known. Gaps could be identified and resources could be redirected to fill these gaps. This should be accomplished by the RPSEA 11121-5101-01 project, and follow on work in the 2014 Annual Plan is critical. This research effort could also include advanced decision support and backup systems.

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<sup>1</sup> Deep Water: The Gulf Oil Disaster and the Future of Offshore Drilling, Report to the President, National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, Page vii. January 2011.

Although it may be late in the research program, some future consideration should be given to issues related to the containment of hydrocarbons throughout the entire lifecycle of an oil or gas field. The flow of hydrocarbons should be exclusively confined to the reservoir and production infrastructure. Not only should hydrocarbon flow be controlled, but also any injected fluids or gas. There is funded research on the metallurgy of pipes and on cements; however, there appears to be little attention paid to other potential avenues of leakage, such as long term borehole stability and fracturing through the overburden formations. Also, there is funded research in reservoir characterization, but little to no attention paid to characterizing the overburden for potential paths of leakage and areas of abnormal pressure. In the *2014 Annual Plan* there is a solicitation for reservoir and overburden characterization and we encourage this effort. Technology is lacking for adequate monitoring of hydrocarbon production and this is particularly true in UDW environments. There is project solicitation on advanced pore pressure prediction but very little on long term containment monitoring.

We feel it is important to include a general comment not exclusive to UDW but applicable to other marine operations. Information is limited regarding methods to prevent and respond to catastrophic events, and mitigate the negative impacts of spills in remote, harsh and sensitive environments. Environmental protection and personnel health and safety working in harsh, unique and sensitive marine habitats requires additional focus. Characterization of the risks to unique and sensitive marine habitats associated with drilling, completion and production activities demands more research.

The R&D Program subcommittee offers the following findings and recommendations. We are not requesting a change of direction of the program, but wish to point out significant areas of research for UDW that should warrant further attention.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

### **Finding 1**

The *2014 Annual Plan* does not adequately address human factors related to accident prevention. The following recommendations would enhance the program:

### **Recommendation 1**

Increase the emphasis in areas of human interaction. Models can be found in training or simulator programs utilized by nuclear and aviation industries. Effective implementation will require that the *2014 Annual Plan* be modified to give this area higher priority.

Possible areas of focus might include:

- Prepare a survey of studies on human behavior in hazardous operating environments, (while this may be included in RPSEA 11121-5101-01, we encourage the follow on of this project);

- Continued work on instruments and data analysis (expert systems) to improve decision making capability, and;
- Expand work on hazards and risk analysis from a human perspective. Training methods such as those used in nuclear submarine and nuclear materials handling in the USN and DOE National labs might be adaptable for UDW operations.

### **Finding 2**

The *2014 Annual Plan* lacks content regarding expert (case based) systems that alert operating personnel to potential hazards before they occur, which provide recommendations to mitigate potential risk. There appears to be a gap in developing a systematic way to integrate and analyze diverse measurements related to the overall safety of deepwater operations.

### **Recommendation 2**

Determine the present scope of expert (case based) systems, and then identify benefits and limitations as well as other applications (such as cementing, completions, wellbore design, etc.) that would reduce the risk when operating in deepwater. The development of synthesis and analysis systems that integrate different types of data can be useful for ensuring safe operations.

### **Finding 3**

The safe and environmentally responsible operation of oil and gas production throughout the entire life of a field requires the containment of hydrocarbons to the reservoir, production casing and surface facilities. Barriers in both the wellbore vicinity and the subsurface should be identified, and facilities should be designed accordingly. Also, adequate monitoring systems need to be developed so that out of zone flow can be detected early and mitigated. There are elements of containment (pipe metallurgy and cements) but no comprehensive program in the *2014 Annual Plan* for addressing this issue.

### **Recommendation 3**

Possible areas of focus might include:

- Mitigate leakage in and around the boreholes from reservoir fluids and gas as well as any injected liquids and materials;
- Long term borehole stability;
- Establish plugging and abandoning technology for long term containment of hydrocarbons, and;
- Long term monitoring systems (i.e. downhole and well head pressure sensors, time lapse seismic surveying, sea bed monitoring, etc.);
- Expand the NETL complementary research program to include larger range of issues of borehole integrity.

### **Finding 4**

The *2014 Annual Plan* stresses the need for better reservoir characterization in the research program, but little attention is given to overburden characterization. Possible abnormal pressure zones and leak paths can negatively affect the drilling and production

activities. There is no effort to monitor the overburden changes throughout the complete lifecycle of a producing field.

**Recommendation 4**

Expand the research on reservoir characterization to include overburden characterization as well. Technology and methods for geological and geomechanical characterization of the subsurface from sea bed to the reservoir should be emphasized. Develop systems to monitor overburden variations over time.

**Finding 5**

In funded projects aimed at reducing risks in the UDW, there lacks a comprehensive understanding of how the individual components fit together. The risk and the consequences are addressed in the individual components of drilling and engineering design, but not of the overall system.

**Recommendation 5**

The Engineering and Operational Practices (EOP) should be developed for overall logistics of UDW operations. The EOP should be designed to capture all risk elements, their interdependencies, and the associated consequences. We recommend that EOP be included in relevant projects funded by the research program.

## **Sunset Committee**

The research program designated under the Department of Energy Section 999 is to end on the 30th of September 2014. At present, it is understood that ongoing projects that have funding already allocated, will continue to be funded with the projects and funding to be administrated by the National Energy Technology Laboratory (NETL).

The task of the Sunset Committee has thus been to review the activities of the projects completed so far or ongoing, and to look towards the further continuation of the work as the program comes to its end. An important aspect of the termination of any research program is to ensure that the work done is well documented, and that sufficient effort is devoted in the future to maintaining an archive of the results, to making sure that the archive is accessible, and to taking active steps to bring the work to the attention of the relevant audience.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

#### **Finding No. 1: Current Projects**

Current projects that show promising results to date are underway.

#### **Recommendation No. 1**

The current research program should be maintained, making sure that these projects are not prematurely ended due to the sunset, even though the management of the research contracts is changed.

#### **Finding No. 2: Documentation and Dissemination of Results**

The committee members recognize that such research takes many years to develop, with continuing adjustment to the research targets as time goes on. We note the good work being done by both RPSEA and NETL in collecting and archiving the results of past and current projects. This work is important.

#### **Recommendation No. 2-1**

DOE should maintain documentation and dissemination of the results after the termination of active research when personnel previously associated with the program become engaged in new projects. Funding should be specifically allocated to this activity.

### **Recommendation No. 2-2**

Active steps should continue to be taken to bring the results of the program to the attention of possible beneficiaries. This should include *inter alia*, the maintenance of a web site and making presentations at conferences. These presentations should not only concern the results of particular projects, but also bring the attention of the public to the existence of the archive itself.

### **Finding No. 3: Workings of the Advisory Committee**

Members of the Subcommittee have enjoyed participating in UDAC activities with the diversity of the group providing interesting and stimulating discussions. We believe that forming the committee from a group that has expertise in many fields relating to petroleum engineering has been helpful in broadening the scope of projects that are being funded by the program. Since the current funding is aimed at a very broad target (to advance research in any aspect of ultra deepwater petroleum exploration and production) this was an ideal environment to address subjects that are not found in the more common, much more finely focused programs.

From time to time, we have requested that we be informed as to whether our recommendations have had an influence on the direction of the work, and this has generally been the case. The committee is interested in the research outcomes.

### **Recommendation No. 3-1**

If other research efforts require an Advisory Committee similar to this effort, the committee should include a wide array of experts (not necessarily only from the field of petroleum engineering) so as to be able to consider a very wide range of research topics.

### **Recommendation No. 3-2**

The committee recommends that the committee members continue to be informed as to the results from the research program and other related programs not only while the research is active, but also afterwards.

**Advisory Committee Members**

Dr.	George	Cooper*	University of California, Berkeley
Dr.	Quenton R.	Dokken	Gulf of Mexico Foundation
Dr.	Hartley	Downs	Baker Hughes Incorporated
Dr.	Douglas J.	Foster	ConocoPhillips
Mr.	James D.	Litton*	Litton Consulting Group, Inc.
Mr.	D. Stephen	Pye*	Consultant
Ms.	Mary Jane	Wilson*	WZI Inc.
Dr.	Lesli	Wood*	Bureau of Economic Geology University of Texas at Austin

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