

Strategic Environmental Assessments for the Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Area

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The Canada—Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board (C-NLOPB) is responsible for petroleum resource management in the Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Area on behalf of the Governments of Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador. The C-NLOPB facilitates the exploration and development of petroleum resources in accordance with statutory provisions. The Board's regulatory responsibilities include the administration and issuance of licences, authorizations and approvals. Since 2002 the C-NLOPB has been undertaking Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) in offshore areas that have not yet been subject to substantial levels of project-based environmental assessments, but where the issuance of Exploration Licences could be contemplated. The SEAs provide information on the environmental setting and environmental considerations that help to inform subsequent regulatory decisions regarding future offshore oil and gas activities in the area. Information from an SEA assists the C-NLOPB in determining whether exploration rights should be offered, as well as identifying any general restrictive or mitigative measures for application to future projects.

A SEA is a broad-based and regional approach to Environmental Assessment (EA) that proactively examines the environmental issues that may be associated with proposed offshore activities and allows for the identification, analysis and incorporation of environmental considerations at the earliest stages of planning and decision-making. It focuses on describing the environmental setting (i.e. physical, biological, and human) and on identifying potential overall environmental issues and potential effects. The boundaries for each SEA are chosen by the C-NLOPB based on historical activity in the area and the definition of the Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) offshore area in the *Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act* and the *Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Atlantic Accord Implementation Newfoundland and Labrador Act*. The temporal scope of the SEA is approximately 10 years but reviewed in five to determine whether an update is required.

The SEA does not deal with regulatory or policy decisions or with topics that are not related specifically to offshore licencing decisions. The specific strategic decision that the SEA is intended to inform is whether further exploration rights should be issued in whole, in part, or at all in the Newfoundland and Labrador offshore area, and if so, to identify any environmental components and issues which should be considered in taking these future decisions and actions. The SEA provides individual operators with an initial overview of the existing environmental setting of the offshore and helps define key environmental issues, interactions and mitigation measures which may require consideration in the early planning phases of individual projects, as well as in subsequent approval processes.

The planning and preparation of a SEA and its associated consultation activities is guided by a Scoping Document, which outlines the factors to be considered, the scope of those factors, and guidelines for

preparing the SEA report. The Scope of the SEA is developed by the C-NLOPB with the assistance of a Working Group with representation from federal and provincial government agencies, Regional Development Boards, the fishing industry and non-governmental organizations. The draft Scope of the SEA is typically made available for public input before finalization.

An important component of an SEA is its program for public and stakeholder engagement. The consultation activities are designed to identify questions or concerns regarding future oil and gas exploration and/or production activities. The preparation of an SEA includes discussions with government departments and agencies, stakeholder groups and the general public. Various mechanisms have been used to provide interested groups and individuals with information on the SEA objectives and process. A consultation program typically includes a series of Public Open Houses held in locations in close proximity to the SEA Study Area. A series of stakeholder meetings are also arranged with organizations identified by Working Group members. In addition to the planned Stakeholder Meetings and Public Open Houses at each identified location, time is allotted in several locations to meet with fishers and fishing groups. Consultations occur at a very early stage of the SEA process before the completion of the SEA report. They are advertised through newspaper ads, other local and province-wide media, and the C-NLOPB website. The SEA Study Team, which includes representatives of the C-NLOPB and the Contractor, is present at all consultation meetings to provide information, clarification, answer questions, and record questions, issues and perspectives that may be raised. The information gathered through the consultation process informs SEAs by identifying key information requirements and issues that should be considered. The draft SEA report is made available to the public for comment and all comments that are received on the SEA are published on the C-NLOPB website. Notification of the availability of the draft report for comment is placed in newspapers and on the C-NLOPB website. All comments received on the draft SEA are considered by the C-NLOPB and the SEA, including recommendations regarding rights and potential conditions for oil and gas activity, is finalized.