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ABSTRACT

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Billions of Barrels Need Traps and more: Satellite Altimetry Data over the Spratleys Area Strengthens Evidence for Economic Features

The USGS has estimated 28 billion BOE in the Spratleys; one "guesstimate" is an order of magnitude greater. An interpretation built with multi-faceted data set atop a regional gravity study yields evidence of features that might contain giant hydrocarbons. The SEAMAGIC project also considers the adequacy of sourcing and sealing for such volumes and reviews evidence for reservoir distribution. This resource level could easily justify test drilling.

To stir up the crowd at SEC03, SEAMAGIC authors threw out the title, "Insights on Prospectivity of Disputed Zones, South China Sea". Disputed areas of the South China Sea (SCS) outboard of current oil and gas production can be explored with existing data, particularly satellite altimetry. Our working scales ranged from the tectonic interpretation of the SCS to redefining basins and identifying depocenters with associated sediment delivery systems around the deepwater margins of the SCS. We covered the basic exploration checklist, concluding that exploration potential was favourable. It turns out, to paraphrase a politician, "a year is a long time in geology". With evolving data at ever better resolutions and continued work on a South Atlantic margins project, SAMBA, and this SE Asia study, we improved our picture of controls on deepwater reservoirs. Our data now allow discrimination of individual features of "elephant" prospect size and especially of the fetch areas around and adjacent to these highs. At SEC03, we identified sourcing as the greatest exploration risk so concentrated on improved definition of a) the fetch areas and b) total sediment thicknesses with implications for maturity. We also have better discrimination of features likely to have sufficient burial to be sealed. We still do not have direct knowledge of hydrocarbons in Spratleys except for shows in wells in nearby Reed Bank. Consequently, we decline, at least until SEC07, the title, "Spratleys Replace South Atlantic 'Golden Triangle' as Hottest Discovery Area".