

Cyclone Shuts Australian Oil Fields

Oil producers were forced to suspend more than half of Australia's oil and gas production output and a number of exploration operations after a tropical cyclone threatened facilities offshore north Western Australia recently.

The Bureau of Meteorology said Tropical Cyclone Dominic, a category 2 storm, brought high winds of up to 135 km/h, heavy rain, flash flooding and rough seas before crossing the coast at the west-Pilbara coastal town of Onslow on 27 January.

MEO Australia said it had halted operations on the Songa Venus drilling rig, which is drilling the Zeus-1 well in the Timor Sea off Australia's north, because of the cyclone. Workers were expected to begin returning to the rig on 27 January.

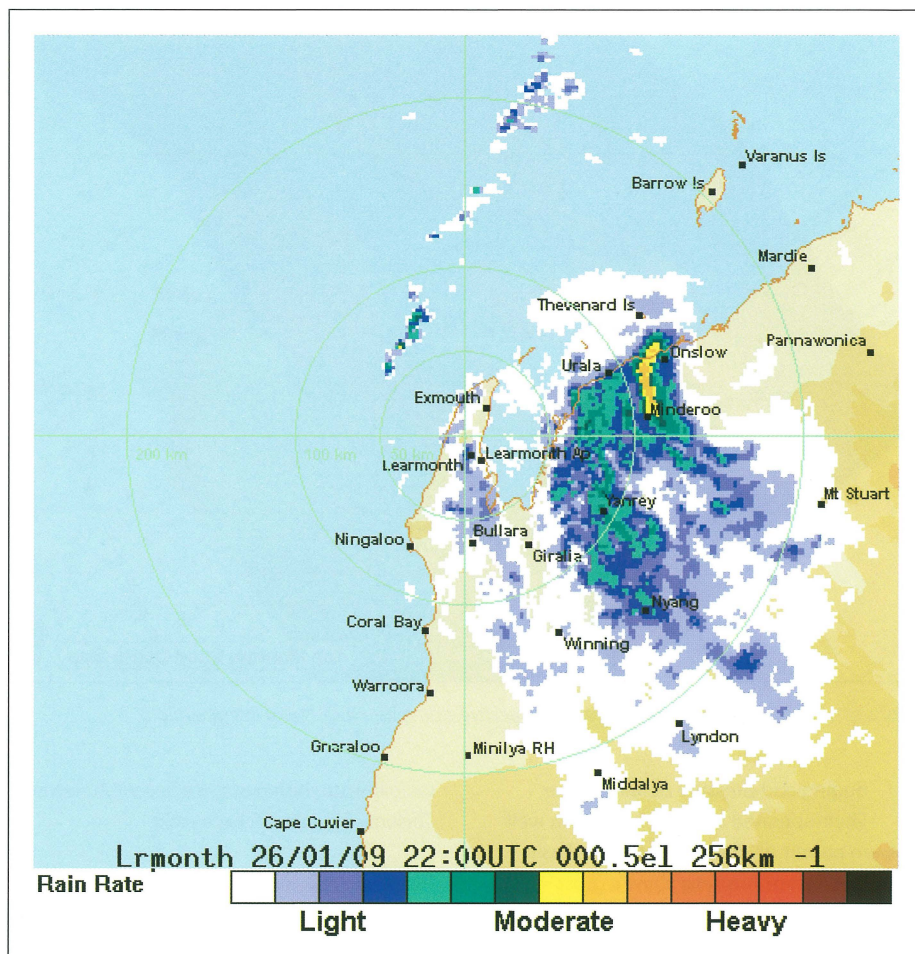
The operator, BHP, said it had closed the Stybarrow and Griffin fields and Woodside halted output at the Vincent, Enfield and Cossack fields while the cyclone posed a threat. Apache and Santos also halted operations, taking the total reported closures to about 265,000 bopd and condensates.

According to the Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resouce Economics (ABARE), Australia may produce about 470,000 bopd of crude and condensates, a type of light oil, in the year ending 30 June.

BHP Billiton Media Relations Manager for Australia and Asia, Samantha Evans, said the production vessel used at Stybarrow, the largest of the affected fields, was disconnected on 26 January. BHP had earlier ceased output from the Griffin oil field and moved the production vessel clear of the storm's path.

Stybarrow, half-owned by Woodside, produced about 59,200 bopd in the fourth quarter of 2008.

Woodside spokesman Roger Martin said output at the Vincent and Enfield oil fields had been suspended on 25 January. The ventures had combined output of about 72,800 bopd in the December quarter of 2008. The \$25 B North West Shelf Joint Venture (NWSJV) also stopped output at the Cossack oil venture and



Learmonth radar image of Tropical Cyclone Dominic at 0700 WDT 27 January 2009 as it crossed the coast about 12 km ENE of Onslow. Although on the image it looks as if the system is further south it is actually located just on the coast at this time. Onslow recorded a maximum gust of 133 km/h at 0700 WDT 27 January.

at the Angel gas and condensates platform, he said.

Operations on three drilling rigs were interrupted by the cyclone and workers were evacuated for the duration of the bad weather. Exports of liquefied natural gas were also halted from the Woodside operated NWSJV Onshore Gas Plant (OGP).

Apache evacuated more than 160 workers from the Varanus Island gas processing site off the northwest coast, which is currently operating at 85% of capacity after an explosion in July, in advance of the cyclone.

Apache's Perth-based spokesman, David Parker, said workers were evacuated from the Apache-

operated Stag and Legendre oil production platforms on 25 January and the floating storage vessels sailed to calmer waters.

Santos also halted output at the Mutineer-Exeter oil venture during the same period.

Dominic is the third tropical cyclone to affect the region so far this season, after Anika and Billy.

According to an October forecast by the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) northwest Western Australia, which hosts most of the country's oil and gas production, is expected to experience more tropical cyclones than average this season. The BOM said the region may experience up to seven cyclones between November and April, up from four in the previous cyclone season. ■