

18 May 2015 - Salt core well for gas storage project gets underway

Drilling to obtain samples of Permian salt from a mile below Larne Lough got underway this week by Islandmagee Storage Limited (IMSL) marking a key milestone in the development of the company's multi-million pound Islandmagee gas storage project.

The test well – which is expected to take around five weeks to complete – will enable IMSL to carry out analysis on the 250 million-year-old salt deposits to confirm the project's viability and complete the design of the caverns in which it proposes to create and store 500 million cubic metres of natural gas – enough to satisfy Northern Ireland's demand for 60 days.

Speaking about the commencement of the salt core drilling operations, Anita Gardiner, Managing Director of IMSL said: "We are pleased to report commencement of the drilling of the well at Islandmagee. The analysis of the Permian salt is an integral part in the development of the gas storage project. The project is recognised on a European level as a strategically important asset that will improve the security of supply and increase the flexibility available in the gas markets in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and enable greater interconnectivity across these three neighbouring markets, whilst supporting the achievement of national renewable and carbon reduction targets."

IMSL aims to have all the laboratory analyses, including rock mechanical tests to further define the design parameters and cost estimate for the project, completed by the end of 2015. The costs of this 2015 work programme are being funded 50% by the European Commission under their Connecting Europe Facility.

Gas storage has been used safely throughout Europe for more than 40 years in areas where the salt sequences are sufficiently thick to create caverns. The Larne Lough area is the only place on the island of Ireland where a suitable underground salt sequence has been found. In addition to the favourable geology of the area, Islandmagee already contains the main gas and electricity network required for gas storage.

Over the last eight years the company has been liaising with local stakeholders on its plans to construct seven caverns within the Permian salt layer below Larne Lough. Two dedicated stakeholder liaison groups have been established for the project – a Community Liaison Group (CLG) and a Marine Science Group (MSG).

The CLG is managed by the company and has been established to keep the local community informed at each stage of activity for the project. The MSG, which is managed by DoE Marine Division, incorporates members of the relevant government agencies, the fishing community, marine tourism stakeholders, non-government organisations and IMSL representatives. The MSG has been the forum through which mitigation and monitoring measures have been developed and agreed for incorporation into the various marine licences required by the project. The MSG will remain an integral part of the regulation and monitoring of the brine discharge, the composition of which will be confirmed by analysing the salt cores recovered from the well.

Recognising the valuable contribution made by these groups, Ms Gardiner said: "The liaison groups continue to

provide a two-way forum for the company to share information about the construction activities and the marine monitoring programme and offer an important mechanism for the local community and other stakeholders to feedback information on project activities. IMSL is grateful for all the work carried out to date by the liaison groups and thanks the local community in Islandmagee for all their support and co-operation to date – particularly during the recent site preparation and rig mobilisation work. We look forward to working closely with all our stakeholders as the project develops further.”

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