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Norway to start work for 26th round with frontier acreage on the cards

The Norwegian Government is to begin preparations for the 26th licensing round, which will offer operators access to frontier acreage outside the areas already made available through the APA process.

Energy minister Terje Aasland, in a statement last Thursday (7 August) while attending the formal inauguration of the Johan Castberg field in the Barents Sea, said that to remain a long-term supplier of oil and gas to Europe, Norway must make more discoveries and that means it must do more exploration (*see also Production*). “That is why today we are launching the process for the 26th licensing round for awarding new production licences,” Aasland said.

The Norwegian Offshore Directorate (NOD) has been tasked with organising a nomination process through which licensees on the Norwegian Shelf will be able to propose the areas they would like to see offered in the potential 26th round. Operators will be able to nominate all acreage that is open and available to be licensed, but is not part of the APA area.

The nomination process, together with the regulator’s own subsurface assessments, will form the basis for the NOD’s recommendation to the energy ministry on what acreage should be offered in the potential round.

The energy ministry said that a large share of expected remaining resources on the Norwegian Shelf have yet to be proven and that new discoveries through continued exploration, along with improved recovery and the development of profitable finds, “are essential to limit the expected gradual decline in production from the early-2030s onwards”.

It said the government will support continued exploration by holding licence rounds every year, with the annual APA rounds, which cover most available acreage, set to remain the mainstay of exploration policy.

Bids are due to be submitted in the APA 2025 round on 2 September, with awards set to follow in January next year in a round that includes eight new blocks in the Norwegian Sea and 76 more in the Barents. (*Continued on page 2*)