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Equinor and Wellesley collaborate to boost Norwegian Shelf HPHT drilling

Equinor and Wellesley Petroleum are to establish a joint exploration project that is intended to boost high-pressure, high-temperature (HPHT) drilling activity on the Norwegian Shelf.

Wellesley, in a statement last Thursday (5 March), said the aim of the collaboration is to drill up to 15 exploration wells in the period from 2027 through 2030.

The company said that it will target operating up to three-to-five HPHT wells per year, with drilling taking place in licences where the pair already work together and in close collaboration with other licence partners.

Wellesley described the plan as a joint exploration project that will seek to contribute to long-term production from existing infrastructure. The company said it will bring together Equinor's regional knowledge, subsurface experience and infrastructure position with Wellesley's focused exploration model and proven capability as an HPHT drilling operator.

"The objective is to improve the quality of the NCS prospect portfolio, increase exploration activity and accelerate the time from exploration drilling to first production," Wellesley said.

The collaboration will focus on selected core areas of the Northern North Sea, where deeper targets remain underexplored, but offer significant resource potential. "By combining datasets, interpretations and technical expertise, the companies aim to mature prospects more efficiently and prioritise the most robust drilling candidates," Wellesley said.

The company emphasised that the collaboration does not mean a formal joint venture, partnership or new legal entity, that each company retains its full independence and that all drilling decisions will remain subject to approval by production licence partnerships as normal.

Work on the project will start this year, with exploration drilling under the programme planned from 2027 onwards.