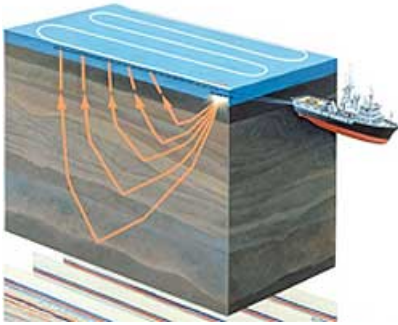


New Age SA to resume oil, gas exploration off Eastern Cape

By [Sue Blaine](#)

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A suspension of oil and gas exploration off the South African coast near Port Elizabeth, imposed after a scientist lodged a complaint on its impact on the migration of humpback whales, had been lifted, Petroleum Agency of SA (Pasa) regulations general manager Tebogo Motlounng said.



Seismic investigations off South Africa's coast will be halted so as not to interfere with the migration paths of whales. Image: [Energy Mx Report](#)

Recent discoveries of major gas and oil deposits in southern Africa could dramatically improve prospects for southern African countries - reducing imports, driving economic growth, and lowering carbon dioxide levels in power generation, according to research by global management consulting firm AT Kearney.

Pasa imposed a short halt on New African Global Energy (New Age) SA's seismic survey, but Motlounng said the oil company had agreed to modify its exploration methods so as not to affect the whales' movements along the coast.

Port Elizabeth environmental consultant Paul Martin said as long as New Age kept to its undertaking to start work deep sea, moving slowly towards the coast so that it reached the whales' migration path only in early January, this would be fine.

New Age said it had created a "no-activity buffer zone" stretching 10km from the Addo Marine Protected Area and would assume responsibility to "minimise any potential impact on the marine offshore environment" while conducting its three-dimensional seismic survey.

Marine mammal observers

The company had two marine mammal observers and a "passive acoustic monitoring observer" on board its survey vessel. These officials continually monitored the ocean for the presence of marine mammals.

"If any whales or other marine mammals are present inside 500m from our vessel before recording on each survey line we wait until they are clear before continuing operations," the company said. "We will always take action, as required by our environmental management plan, to avoid any harm to wildlife in this area," the company added.

Martin said Pasa's quick action in halting the exploration, which kicked off earlier than initially planned, was appreciated.

In 2010 and 2011, a potential 500-trillion cubic feet of gas was identified at sites of the coast of Mozambique and SA, along with 11-billion barrels of oil found in Namibia. Together, these countries' gas reserves equal those of Canada or Venezuela, said AT Kearney.

The seismic survey is conducted by bouncing sound waves off undersea rock formations to detect deposits to create a three-dimensional map of the seabed.

Five international companies, among them Royal Dutch Shell and London-based New Age (African Global Energy), have licences for seismic surveys along the east coast from Jeffrey's Bay to the Wild Coast.

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