

**CAUTION:** There is a need for elaborate precautions to be put in place ahead of drilling of an offshore well in the Lamu basin, to safeguard the fragile ecosystem in the area

## Lamu oil drilling worries marine bodies

By PATRICK MAYOYO

Special Correspondent

**F**or a country dogged by dwindling fish stocks, diminishing mangrove forests and coral reefs, Kenya's Coast faces an environmental nightmare.

And following recent developments where oil exploration firms have shown an intense interest in Kenya, international conservation body World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is warning that the government should take measures to ensure the search for oil is done in line with international standards.

According to Dr Amani Ngusuru, the WWF team leader for the Eastern Africa Marine Ecoregion programme, international oil exploration firms are known not to have comprehensive environmental components in planning offshore oil operations. Kenya should ensure oil exploration activities will not be counterproductive to conservation efforts.

He said WWF is concerned by the lack of environmental components in planning offshore oil and gas exploration and development.

"There is often an assumption of development in all ar-

in Malindi and Msambweni in Kwale district.

It is emerging that although the British-Australian-Spanish consortium behind the drilling of offshore oil wells in the Lamu basin says it has conducted an environment impact assessment (EIA) in the area, many stakeholders say they have not seen the report.

This is contrary to international principles fundamental to sustainable development, which require transparency and accountability in the implementation of development projects.

**A**ccording to Hussein Khalid, programmes co-ordinator of Muslims for Human Rights (Muhuri), the body has written several letters to the National Environment Management Authority requesting an EIA report, without success.

Mr Khalid said, "We do not know why Nema has refused to furnish us with a copy of the EIA report. We have to them informing them of the concerns of Lamu residents about the effects of drilling of offshore oil wells in the Lamu basin."

Oil exploration in Lamu is being conducted by a Brit-





feas, lack of consistency and completeness in environmental information and inadequate monitoring and control of operations," he said.

Dr Ngusuru said WWF believes there should be internationally accepted environmental principles for mineral exploitation including decommissioning activities which affect the marine environment.

He said there was need for elaborate precautions to be put in place ahead of drilling of an offshore well in the Lamu basin, to safeguard the fragile ecosystem in the area.

**D**r Ngusuru said Lamu is among four priority sites identified in Kenya to be protected under the Eastern Africa Marine Ecoregion (EAME) programme.

"We are therefore naturally concerned about developments in Lamu and hope that precautions will be taken to safeguard this critical system," he said.

Dr Ngusuru said Lamu is classified by the EAME as an important global biodiversity site because of the combination of unique habitats, resident and migratory species and a mangrove forest cover.

He said the EAME marine and coastal biodiversity programme is being implemented in five countries — Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa — for the management of marine natural resources.

The other EAME programme sites in Kenya are Tana River Delta, Mida Creek

ish-Australian consortium, which comprises Global Petroleum Ltd, Dana Petroleum plc, Woodside Energy and Repsol Exploration sa.

Alex Taylor, general manager of Woodside Kenya Ltd, says the firm carried out an EIA and the report was submitted to the government in November 2005. It was approved in March last year and an EIA licence issued by Nema.

"The decision on whether the EIA is released to the public is a matter for the government. It is our understanding that it was available for public review during the review period," he said.

Mr Taylor said Woodside Energy (Kenya) Pty Ltd has sought Nema approval to post the EIA on its website.

Although WWF says it would be appropriate to undertake social impact assessment alongside EIA, especially in developing countries like Kenya — where the natural environment is closely linked to sustainable livelihoods — Mr Taylor said Woodside Energy had combined the two components in

Mv Polar Duke, one of the vessels involved in the search for oil along the Kenyan Coast. Picture: Gideon Mwandu

its EIA report.

He said exploration was a short duration programme but if oil or gas is found in commercial quantities then a full social impact will be undertaken in line with international practices.

"Exploration drilling is expected to have minimal environmental effects and negligible social effects given the short duration of the programme — 60-80 days — the offshore distance and water depths," he said.

Mr Taylor added that Woodside Energy had also put in place measures to safeguard the fragile ecosystems in Lamu basin from any risk like oil spills from blowouts or shipping accidents.

"A major component of our EIA was the preparation of an oil spill contingency plan in the event of an accident offshore," he said.

"This plan was supported by a comprehensive oil spill modelling assessment carried out using satellite data of ocean wind and currents and actual oceanographic data

measurements during 2005 and 2006," he said.

He said during operations, their vessels will be equipped with oil spill fighting equipment and trained personnel and will be supported by specially equipped aircraft designed to combat oil spills in emergencies.

**M**r Taylor said the substantial effort that Woodside had put in place for its operations should be put in context considering the threat to Kenya in normal times by oil tanker traffic along the East African coast without any offshore oil spill combat capability in place.

Dr Ngusuru said due to the concerns WWF has on gas and oil developments, it had put in place short and long-term measures to address environmental concerns.

"The immediate priority is to ensure that existing exploration, production and decommissioning avoid impact on the areas of greatest importance for biodiversity, and minimise impact on all other areas," he said.

He said that, in the long run, recognising that oil consumption is inherently unsustainable, WWF supports the need to switch from non-renewable to renewable energy sources.

"This means no new oil exploration. In the medium-term, continuing gas exploration and production is seen as a means to bridge the gap and finance a full transition from

oil to renewable sources of energy," he said.

Dr Ngusuru said WWF had launched a stakeholder-driven programme to support the governments of Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique in ensuring that any development of oil and gas industry is carried out appropriately to minimise the potential dangers to the environment.

"Already WWF has supported a study tour to Nigeria for key government officials from the three countries in April 2006. This was followed by a regional workshop in Nairobi in May 2006," he said.

The WWF official also outlined steps being pursued by the Fund to address the issues of oil and gas development threats in East Africa.

The steps include facilitating dialogue with stakeholders to address possible threats of oil and gas activities to coastal and marine biodiversity.

"Efforts will be made to engage with oil and gas companies prospecting in the region locally and at their headquarters in order to ensure that best practices are implemented for minimising threats to the marine environment," he said.

He said other measures include facilitating and developing mechanisms to enforce existing legislation and to improve decision-making at a strategic level, particularly in sensitive sea areas and environmental assessment.



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