

# OFFSHORE DRILLING PROJECT, DEEP WATER ORANGE BASIN: LETTER OF REQUEST FOR EXEMPTION FROM REQUIREMENT TO CONDUCT A MARITIME AND UNDERWATER CULTURAL HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT



an agency of the  
Department of Arts and Culture

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Case ID: 25560

Date: Friday, 25 July, 2025

## Interim Comment

### In terms of Section 38(8) of the National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999)

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TotalEnergies EP South Africa S.A.S. (TEEPSA) is a holder of an exploration right (ER) (No. 12/3/343) for, Licence Block Deep Water Orange Basin (DWOB), in terms of the Mineral and Petroleum Resource Development Act 28 of 2002 (MPRDA). The licenced block is located off the coast of the Northern Cape, South Africa, between Saldanha Bay and the Orange River Mouth. and is applying to undertake exploration and appraisal drilling activities within an Area of Interest (AOI) 15 000 km<sup>2</sup> in extent in the southern half of the Licence Block DWOB to confirm and test for the presence and quality of hydrocarbon resources.

The applicant is applying to undertake exploration and appraisal drilling activities within an Area of Interest (AOI) 15 000 km<sup>2</sup> in extent in the southern half of the Licence Block DWOB to confirm and test for the presence and quality of hydrocarbon resources. The offshore exploration programme will consist of the drilling up to seven (7) exploration and/or appraisal wells, vertical seismic profiling of each well, well testing and finally, the plugging and abandonment of the wells.

A Maritime Underwater Cultural Heritage (MUCH) Letter of exemption and a Palaeontological letter of exemption by the respective maritime archaeologist and palaeontologist specialists has been submitted to SAHRA for comment, in terms of section 38(8) of the NHRA, Act 25 of 1999.

*Gribble, J. May 2025. OFFSHORE DRILLING PROJECT, DEEP WATER ORANGE BASIN: LETTER OF REQUEST FOR EXEMPTION FROM REQUIREMENT TO CONDUCT A MARITIME AND UNDERWATER CULTURAL HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT.*

The author notes that at least 2800 shipwrecks have been recorded within South Africa's territorial waters, and one wreck named *Kalewa* within or near Block DWOB, depending on the records found. According to the current information there is no shipwrecks in the Block DWOB or the AOI, but there is the possibility, albeit



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unlikely, does exist for the remains of currently unknown and unrecorded wrecks to be present in the Block. From a palaeontological sensitivity assessment, the palaeontologist found that the proposed well drilling has the potential to impact Jurassic or Cretaceous fossils sequestered in the underlying bedrock. The likelihood of impacts to archaeological resources, and shipwrecks are very low, but there is some potential for drilling to impact significant palaeontological resources.

The author recommends the exemption from further studies on the following conditions:

- Well locations are adjusted to avoid any shipwreck or related debris, or palaeontological material identified in pre-drilling environmental baseline survey or pre-spudding ROV survey; and
- If any heritage resources are found during the pre-spudding seafloor survey or after drilling commencement, which could potentially be impacted by the activity, work in the directly affected area must cease (if identified after drilling commencement) until SAHRA has been notified and the operator has complied with any additional mitigation as specified by the SAHRA, including any recommended buffer.

*Bamford, M. May 2025. RE: Request for Exemption of any Palaeontological Impact Assessment for the proposed Deep Water Orange Basin (DWOB) Exploration Drilling EIA off the West Coast of South Africa.*

Block DWOB is located in the Orange Basin which formed due to volcanic rifting in the Late Jurassic to Early Cretaceous period, and potentially fossiliferous. Overlying these are terrestrial deposits from the Cretaceous and Tertiary period lying on the continental shelf. A rare find of fossilised wood closer to land was brought up by the De Beers Exploration Jager mini-submersible. Pollen and foraminifera have been recovered from cores to the south of the DWOB area as well. It is possible that relatively young fossils of marine mammals, sharks and fish could be present in or on the surficial sediments within the Block and that these may be impacted by the proposed well drilling. The author determines that it is difficult to assess the impacts the exploration will have on the fossil resources because of the location of the area but recommends an exemption from further studies on the following conditions:

- Well locations are adjusted to avoid any palaeontological material identified in pre-drilling environmental baseline survey or pre-spudding ROV survey; and
- If any palaeontological resources are found during the pre-spudding seafloor survey or after drilling commencement, which could potentially be impacted by the activity, work in the directly affected area must cease (if identified after drilling commencement) until SAHRA has been notified and the operator

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has complied with any additional mitigation as specified by the SAHRA, including any recommended buffer.

**Interim Comment**

The Development Application Unit notes the submission of the Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage (MUCH) letter of exemption, and the Palaeontological Impact Assessment (PIA) letter of exemption, however, the SAHRA cannot provide further comments until the environmental documents are submitted to the case.

Further comments will be issued upon receipt of the above requested environmental reports.

Should you have any further queries, please contact the designated official using the case number quoted above in the case header.

Yours faithfully

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Nokukhanya Khumalo  
Senior Heritage Officer  
South African Heritage Resources Agency

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Natasha Higgitt  
Manager: Development Applications Unit

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## South African Heritage Resources Agency

### Terms & Conditions:

1. This approval does not exonerate the applicant from obtaining local authority approval or any other necessary approval for proposed work.
2. If any heritage resources, including graves or human remains, are encountered they must be reported to SAHRA immediately.
3. SAHRA reserves the right to request additional information as required.

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### ADMIN:

Direct URL to case: <https://sahris.org.za/node/382918>