

Orange basin: Shell hits hydrocarbons in world's hottest new hunting ground

Jonker-1 wildcat has found hydrocarbons on a different geological play to Shell's previous Graff and Rona finds offshore Namibia

23 January 2023 11:29 GMT *UPDATED* 23 January 2023 13:38 GMT

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The temperature is rising again in Namibia's Orange basin, the world's hottest new hydrocarbon hunting ground, with Upstream told that early signs from Shell's Jonker-1 exploration probe are promising.

Northern Ocean's semi-submersible rig Deepsea Bollsta began drilling the high-profile well in Block 2913A in mid-December.

The probe is chasing a different geological play to the Upper Cretaceous light oil discoveries made last year by Shell's Graff-1 and La Rona-1 exploration wells.

Instead, Jonker-1 is targeting an eastern extension of the Lower Cretaceous oil and gas play that TotalEnergies hit with its Venus-1 probe in adjacent Block 2913B in 2022, potentially Africa's largest ever offshore discovery.

Three informed sources told Upstream in recent days that Jonker-1 has hit hydrocarbons in a shallow reservoir, offering significant encouragement for what may yet be found in the probe's deeper primary objective.

It is understood that Shell was running in-hole flow tests on this secondary target last week.

Shell "has found something interesting in a shallow target and is drilling ahead to the thicker primary objective", said one well-watcher.

Another exploration source said: "They have a hit in the first target (and are) testing it."

A third well-placed contact agreed, saying last week: "They are testing at the moment."

The closed-hole test equipment used by Shell would allow it to achieve flow rates of about 2000 to 3000 barrels per day, according to an observer with knowledge of downhole equipment.

However, because this type of test is short-lived compared to a full production test, it will not give a true indication of the pressure "build-up" rate which is vital to develop an understanding of a reservoir's true potential.

The size of Jonker is not known, but explorers suggested Shell would only drill this probe ahead of appraising and testing Graff if the structure's size is significant and has the potential to host higher quality reservoirs.

"Shell are chasing much better reservoirs than Graff and La Rona which, while they encountered hydrocarbons, have questions over their deliverability," remarked one knowledgeable source.

Multiple contacts in the southern African exploration community have given the name Venus East or East Venus to Shell's prospect.

However, based on current knowledge, Jonker is not expected to be in direct communication with the Venus discovery.

"It looks to be a separate closure on the same play," said an explorer familiar with Namibia.

Another source agreed but believes Jonker does stretch into TotalEnergies' acreage.

"It's separate but does it extend over the border?"

If Shell does make a discovery at Jonker and the prospect is found to either be linked directly to Venus or traverse the boundary between blocks 2912A and 2913A, then unitisation will be needed.

Any future allocation of hydrocarbon resources between the two operating groups could, however, be smoothed somewhat by the presence of Qatar Energy as a partner in both Venus and Jonker.

Shell declined to comment on the status of its latest Namibian well.

Shell operates Petroleum Exploration Licence 0039, which covers blocks 2913A and 2914B, with a 45% working interest.

QatarEnergy also has a 45% stake while state-owned Namcor holds 10%.