History of petroleum

Historically, New Zealand’s Māori indigenous people had knowledge of oil and gas, particularly from onshore seeps on the North Island’s east coast.

In 1865 the Alpha well – one of the first exploration wells in the Commonwealth and the world - was dug near the Moturoa seeps in Taranaki. This was followed by other wells in the area and the shallow Moturoa oil field was producing by the early 20th Century. Exploration on the North Island’s East Coast was also taking place over this period.

In the 1950s the modern age of oil exploration emerged in New Zealand. With the advent of seismic data, the onshore Kapuni gas-condensate field was discovered in Taranaki in 1959 and the large Maui gas-condensate field [http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/oil-and-gas/page-5] was discovered offshore in 1969. The Maui field made New Zealand self-sufficient in gas. The Maui platform, which began operation in 1979, was at the cutting edge of what could be accomplished offshore at the time. A second platform (Māui B) was built in 1993 – which led to the discovery of significant amounts of previously undetected oil.

While New Zealand had traditionally been seen as a gas country, the discovery of the McKee Oil Field [http://www.toddenergy.co.nz/operations/production/production-sites/] – the largest on shore oil field in Australasia - in 1979 changed that perception. McKee has produced almost 48 million barrels to date. The offshore Maari and Tui discoveries, made in 1998 and 2003, are also predominantly oil. As of 2014, almost 6,700 bcf (billion cubic feet) of gas and 450 million barrels of oil have been produced in New Zealand.

Since the discovery of the Kapuni and Maui fields, the petroleum industry has played a significant role in New Zealand’s economic development – as an energy source for industry and households, an input into the chemicals industry, a valuable export and in creating skilled, well-paid jobs, and source of revenue for the Government.

All current production comes from the on and inshore part of the Taranaki Basin. There are 17 other basins in New Zealand’s Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf, which are mostly under-explored.

While there has been offshore exploration drilling around New Zealand since the 1970’s, technology developments in more recent years have allowed operators to explore at greater depths and move further from land. For example, the offshore Northland Basin was drilled for the first time in 1999 and more drilling in deep-water Taranaki and Canterbury Basins occurred in 2013/14.

There is real potential to grow the industry’s contribution to New Zealand’s economy [http://mbie17.cwp.govt.nz/our-industry/value-benefits/].
History of petroleum

Historically, New Zealand's Māori indigenous people had knowledge of oil and gas, particularly from onshore seeps on the North Island's east coast. In 1865 the Alpha well – one of the first exploration wells in the Commonwealth and the world - was dug near the Moturoa seeps in Taranaki. This was followed by other wells in the area and the shallow Moturoa oil field was producing by the early 20th Century. Exploration on the North Island's East Coast was also taking place over this period.

In the 1950s the modern age of oil exploration emerged in New Zealand. With the advent of seismic data, the onshore Kapuni gas-condensate field was discovered in Taranaki in 1959 and the large Maui gas-condensate field was discovered offshore in 1969. The Maui field made New Zealand self-sufficient in gas. The Maui platform, which began operation in 1979, was at the cutting edge of what could be accomplished offshore at the time. A second platform (Māui B) was built in 1993 – which led to the discovery of significant amounts of previously undetected oil.

While New Zealand had traditionally been seen as a gas country, the discovery of the McKee Oil Field – the largest on shore oil field in Australasia - in 1979 changed that perception. McKee has produced almost 48 million barrels to date. The offshore Maari and Tui discoveries, made in 1998 and 2003, are also predominantly oil. As of 2014, almost 6,700 bcf (billion cubic feet) of gas and 450 million barrels of oil have been produced in New Zealand.

Since the discovery of the Kapuni and Maui fields, the petroleum industry has played a significant role in New Zealand's economic development – as an energy source for industry and households, an input into the chemicals industry, a valuable export and in creating skilled, well-paid jobs, and source of revenue for the Government.

All current production comes from the on and inshore part of the Taranaki Basin. There are 17 other basins in New Zealand's Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf, which are mostly under-explored.

While there has been offshore exploration drilling around New Zealand since the 1970's, developments in more recent years have allowed operators to explore at greater depths and move further from land. For example, the offshore Northland Basin was drilled for the first time in 1999 and more drilling in deep-water Taranaki and Canterbury Basins occurred in 2013/14.

There is real potential to grow the industry's contribution to New Zealand's economy.

Last updated: 19 January 2017

© 2017 New Zealand Petroleum & Minerals