## Maintaining robust assessments during key high profile projects

In August 2016, a drilling rig ran aground during severe weather and sea conditions on the northwest coast of Lewis, Scotland. The rig contained marine diesel and hydraulic oil which has the potential to leak out. The rig owner commissioned Xodus to provide immediate environmental support including expert advice on the likely fate of any oil spilled and the best means of monitoring a potential environmental impact. This was a high profile assignment with significant media and public interest with fast timescales. The support that was required needed to be quick but, just as importantly, robust to reassure the authorities and the public.

Immediately after the grounding, the main areas of environmental support that were needed included:

- Identification of sensitive and vulnerable environmental, cultural and socio-economic resources in the area that might be affected;
- Predicting the fate of any oil spilled into the sea at or near the rig grounding site, and the likelihood of interactions with particular environmental sensitivities; and
- The development and initiation of a monitoring programme to identify any environmental impact potentially arising from the rig between its initial grounding and subsequent recovery and departure.

Based on the outcomes of the oil spill modelling and the identification of key sensitive receptors, it was important that a robust monitoring programme around Lewis and Harris was put in place, and quickly.

The first survey was planned and carried out by Xodus in-house specialists, and took place only four days after the rig grounded. It was important that the team Xodus provided were briefed on how to deal with any enquiries from the media or the public during the survey work.

During the planning of the rig recovery programme, further information on marine environmental sensitivities to inform a decision on the holding location for the rig once it was re-floated was prepared. Following this, three further surveys were undertaken in quick succession to sample around the rig holding location. This was to provide a baseline prior to the re-floated rig’s arrival along the north and west coast of Lewis, to check for residual contamination following the rig’s move to the holding location, and within the holding location as a final environmental check once the rig had departed. The survey programme results indicated that there were no detectable residual impacts in terms of environmental contamination.

Environmental impact assessment should always be robust and executed transparently, but it is not always done under such public scrutiny. Throughout the design, surveying, analyses and reporting process, Xodus ensured that there was a clear chain of custody to safeguard sampling transparency and traceability to achieve utmost client and public confidence.
The ability of the environmental support team from Xodus to react quickly but effectively, using specialist staff with over 30 years environmental assessment experience, ensured that the survey and monitoring work provided the rig owner, the authorities and the public with the confidence that the potential environmental impacts of the grounding and recovery programme were robustly assessed and monitored.

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