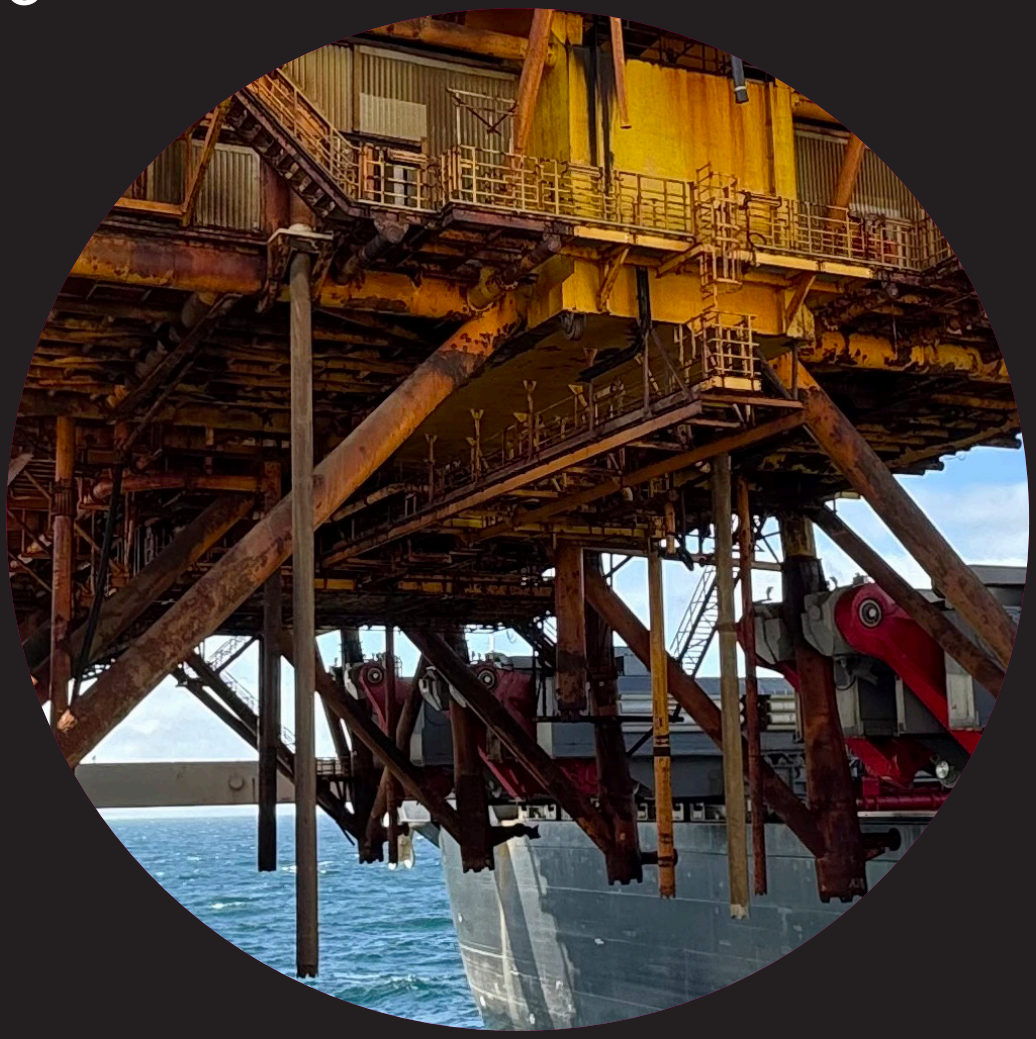
OEUK OFFSHORE ENERGIES UK

DECOMMISSIONING REPORT 2025



The decommissioning outlook for the UK's offshore energy industry

Mermaid Subsea Services (UK)

DECOMMISSIONING REPORT 2025

An integrating offshore energy industry which safely provides cleaner fuel, power and products for everyone in the UK.

Working together, we are a driving force of the UK's energy security and net zero ambitions. Our innovative companies, people and communities add value to the UK economy.

OEUK.org.uk

Contents

FOREWORD

Mark Wilson
HSE & Operations Director
Offshore Energies UK

Welcome to OEUK's *Decommissioning Insight 2025,* offering the most up-to-date and comprehensive overview of ongoing and forecasted decommissioning activities across the United Kingdom Continental Shelf (UKCS) for the coming decade. This report serves as an essential resource, presenting region-specific analysis and actionable insights designed to support both the UK supply chain and the operator community as they navigate the ever-evolving decommissioning landscape.

Maneuvering the decade ahead demands striking a balance between fulfilling decommissioning commitments and sustaining capital investment – a challenge that continues to intensify in complexity. The rising trajectory of decommissioning expenditure reflects not only the acceleration of cessation of production (CoP) but also a fundamental shift in industry priorities, with decommissioning now commanding a larger share of overall budgets across the offshore energy sector. This shift poses both risks and opportunities: while it highlights the UK's commitment to responsible asset decommissioning, it also signals the need for caution as capital investment wanes. Operators and suppliers are increasingly focused on cost-efficiency measures, collaborative campaigns, and innovative approaches to ensure that the sector remains sustainable. Efforts are becoming increasingly focused on managing the rising costs of decommissioning without undermining the economic fabric of the UKCS, striving to future-proof the basin while delivering on legislative and environmental commitments.

The UKCS has reached a historic milestone in decommissioning activity, with annual expenditure surpassing £2 billion for the first time ever in 2024. This record spend highlights both the resilience and commitment of UK operators and the strength of the UK supply chain, despite ongoing political and economic uncertainties impacting the energy sector. The main insights from the report are:

- Annual decommissioning expenditure in 2024 exceeded £2 billion on the UKCS, representing the highest annual outlay to date.
- Projections indicate a continued increase in decommissioning costs, with average annual spend expected to remain elevated through the end of the decade.
- Decommissioning accounted for 15% of total UKCS oil and gas expenditure in 2024, with this percentage of total spend predicted to rise to 30% by 2030.
- Forecasts suggest that decommissioning costs may overtake the oil and gas sector's capital investment as early as 2028, a critical inflection point for operators and the supply chain.

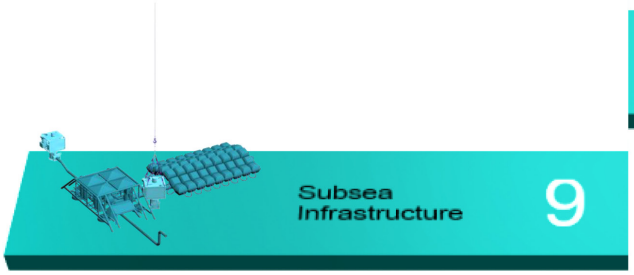
Decom Engineering

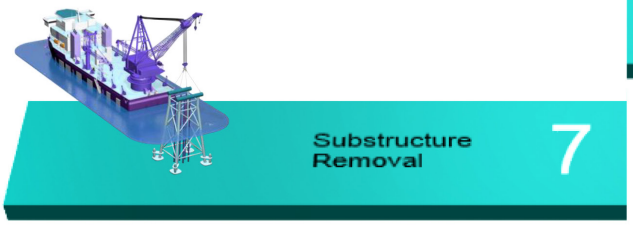
- The increase in CoP decisions has brought projects forward, further increasing short-term decommissioning outlays.
- External factors, such as cost inflation, political uncertainty, reduced new production, and volatile commodity prices, contribute to rising expenditure and greater sector unpredictability.

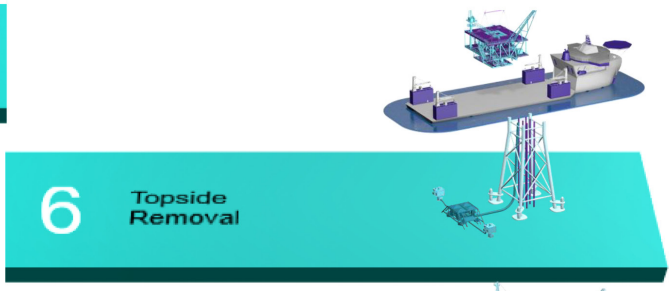
The sustained increase in decommissioning costs signals a challenging transition for the UKCS. While the sector demonstrates robust commitment to fulfilling obligations and supporting the domestic supply chain, the rapid pace of decommissioning, combined with declining production and North Sea investment, poses risks to long-term basin viability and economic recovery. In mitigating these risks, balance must also be achieved throughout; decommissioning is now inevitable for the UKCS, and the sector is advancing rapidly – but without sustained investment and a strategic transition, cost escalation could see the UK risk losing its world-class supply chain to more stable markets.

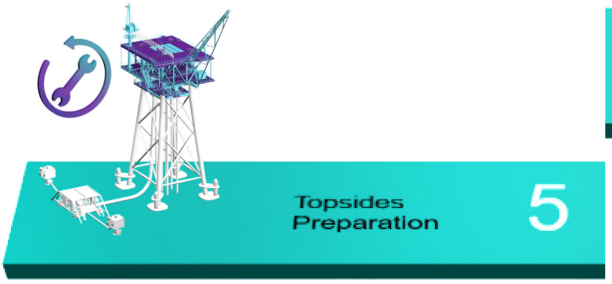
Offshore Energies UK Decommissioning Work Breakdown Structure (WBS)

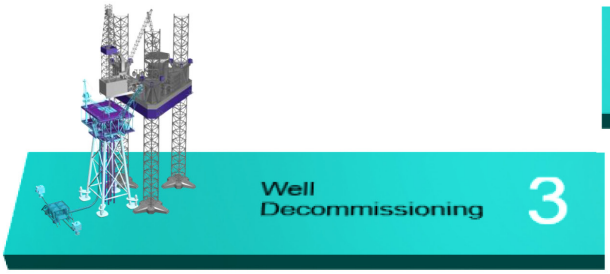
Work break-down structure guidelines

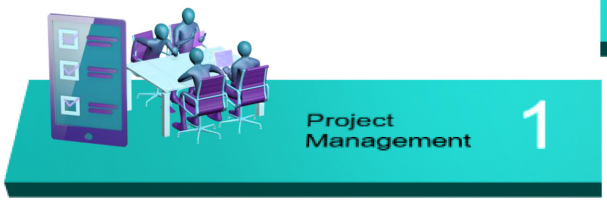


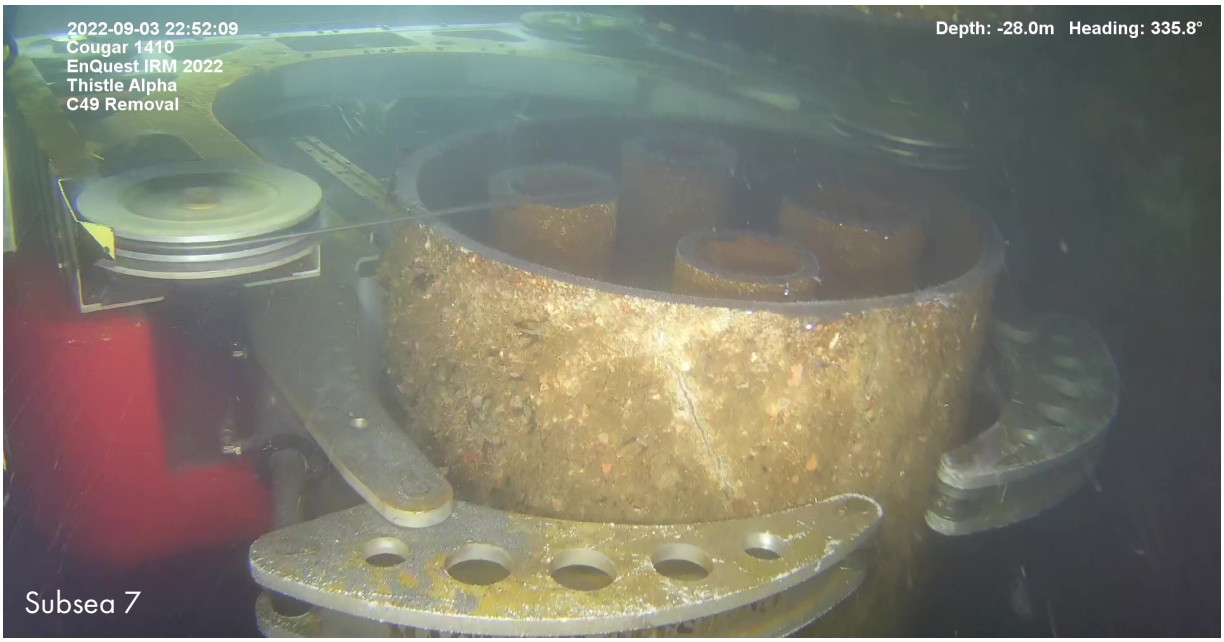


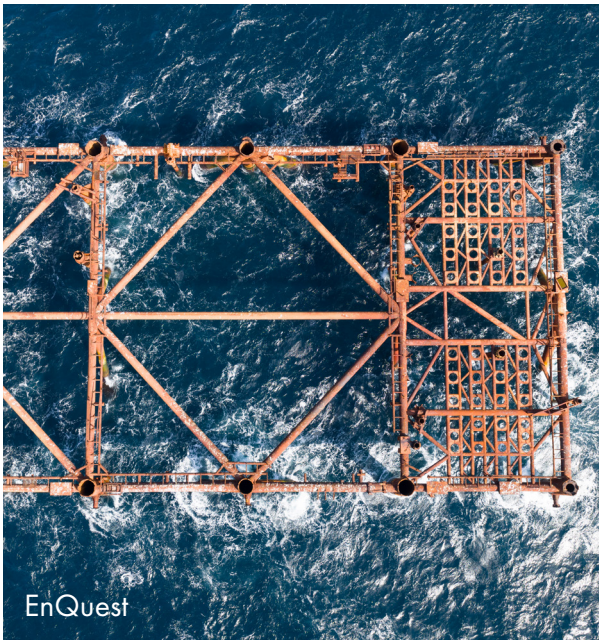









2022-09-03 22:52:09
Cougar 1410
EnQuest IRM 2022
Thistle Alpha
C49 Removal
Depth: -28.0m Heading: 335.8°
Subsea 7


EnQuest


www.bonn-mees.cc
AF Offshore Decom


Wintershall

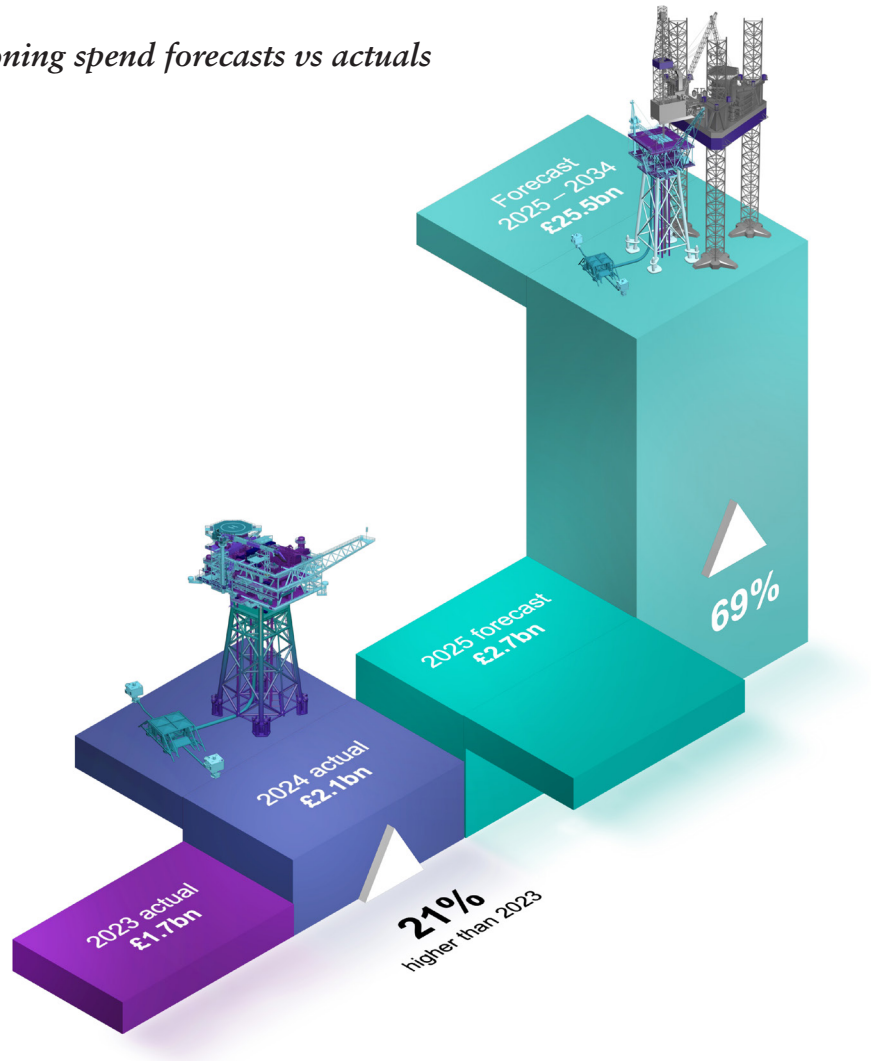

DOF

SECTION 1:

KEY FINDINGS

Decommissioning activity 2024-2025

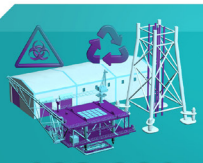
Decommissioning spend forecasts vs actuals



1

154,000

154,000 jobs directly or indirectly related to offshore energy 115,000 are in oil and gas.



122,000t

2026 forecast tonnage topsides and substructures to increase to 122,000 tonnes (from 53000 tonnes in 2025)

195

large wind turbines installed

71%

By 2031 the CNS could account for over two thirds (71%) of spend.

200,000

Supports more than 200,000 jobs and £25bn GVA.

21%

21% higher expenditure than 2023.

Over half of the basins topsides & substructures decommissioning will take place between 2026 – 2034.

Spend:

£1.7bn in 2023

£2.1bn 2024

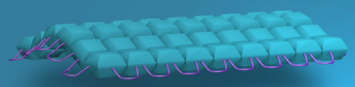
£2.7bn 2025 forecast

70%

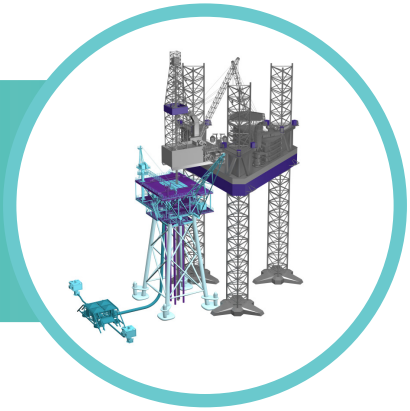
Nearly 70% increase in well decommissioning forecast for 2025. Growth and innovation in decommissioning offers a substantial opportunity for the UK economy and industry as a whole.

4,750t

2024 saw 4,750 tonnes of subsea infrastructure and over 3,000 mattresses removed.



Wells once again bear the burden of the decommissioning costs – accounting for 49% of spend in 2024 and 47% spend across the upcoming decade.



Decommissioning costs per well 2022-2025

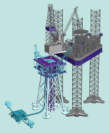
Cost/well (£mn)	2022	2023	2024	2025
Platform	2.56	2.98	3.47	4.08
Subsea	7.89	7.92	8.57	8.99
Exploration & appraisal	4.42	5.33	7.04	8.43

2. The UK's next decade of decommissioning

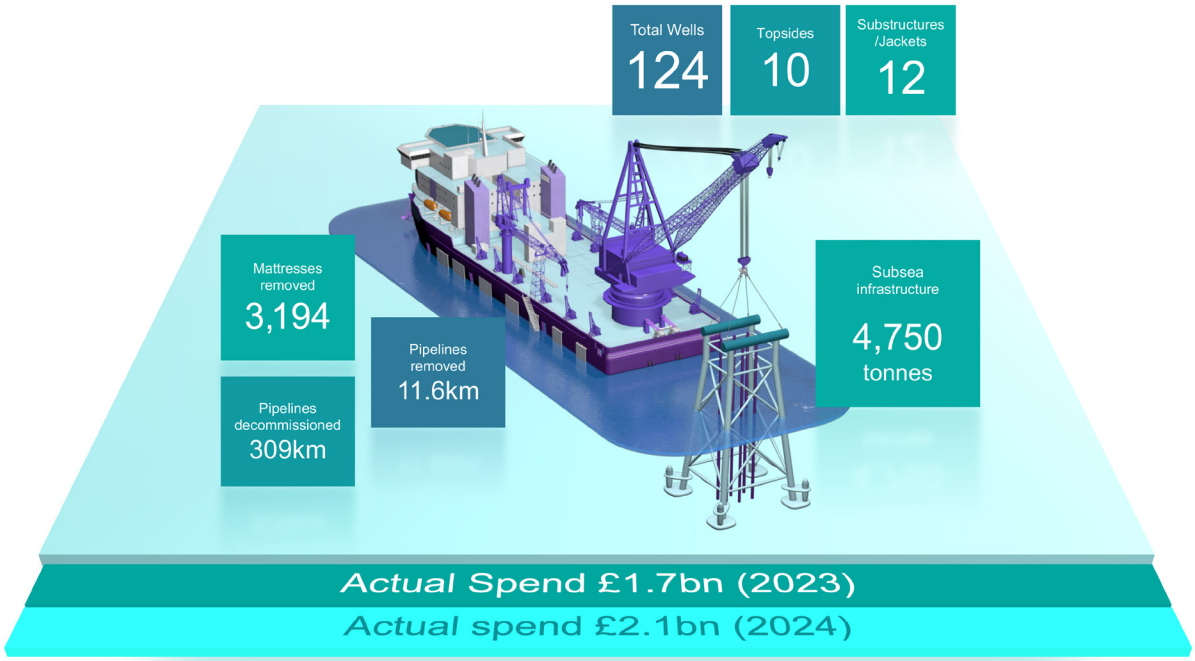
2.1 Short-term outlook

The annual decommissioning spend in the UKCS surpassed the threshold of £2 billion per year, a milestone that reflects the basin's resilience amid political and economic uncertainty. Despite completing slightly less work than forecast, and for more spend, the UKCS continues to demonstrate strength. The volume of work delivered, in combination with the fact that the UK committed more decommissioning spend than any other basin globally, is a testament to the sector's capability and determination. Spend has steadily increased over recent years and forecasts suggest that this upward trend will continue. This further reinforces the need for strategic planning and sustained investment to maintain momentum.

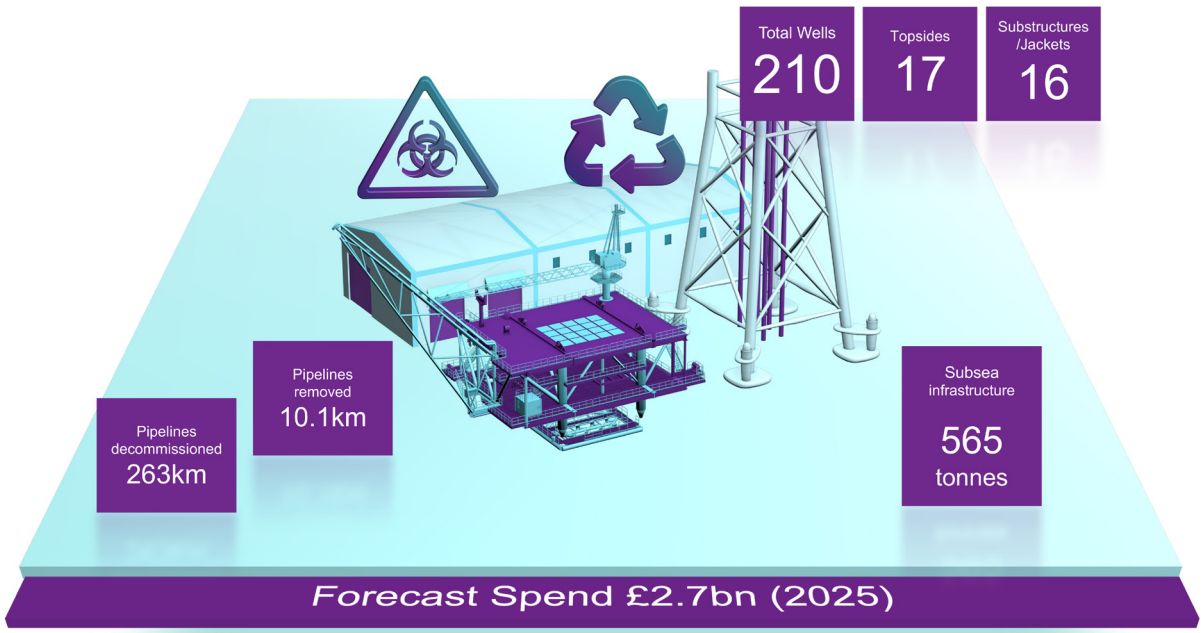
The pace shows no sign of slowing, we are currently forecasting the average decommissioning spend until the end of the decade to sit at £2.9 billion per year. CoP has been brought forward, thus bringing decommissioning projects forward, alongside increasing cost forecasts this side of 2030.

Decommissioning activity	2024 (actuals)	2025 (forecast)
Wells 	124 wells, of which:	210 wells, of which:
	78 platform wells	139 platform wells
	40 subsea wells	48 subsea wells
	6 exploration & appraisal	23 exploration & appraisal
Topsides 	10 topsides	17 topsides
	38,833 tonnes	40,383 tonnes
Substructures 	12 Jackets	16 jackets
	10,924 tonnes	12,741 tonnes
Subsea infrastructure to be removed 	11.6 km of pipelines removed	10.1 km of pipelines to be removed
	4,750 tonnes	565 tonnes
	3,194 mattresses	1,561 mattresses
Overall tonnage of steel removed	54,507 tonnes	53,689 tonnes
Floating production, storage & offtake vessels to be removed (tonnes)	0 tonnes	63,831 tonnes

2024 Actuals



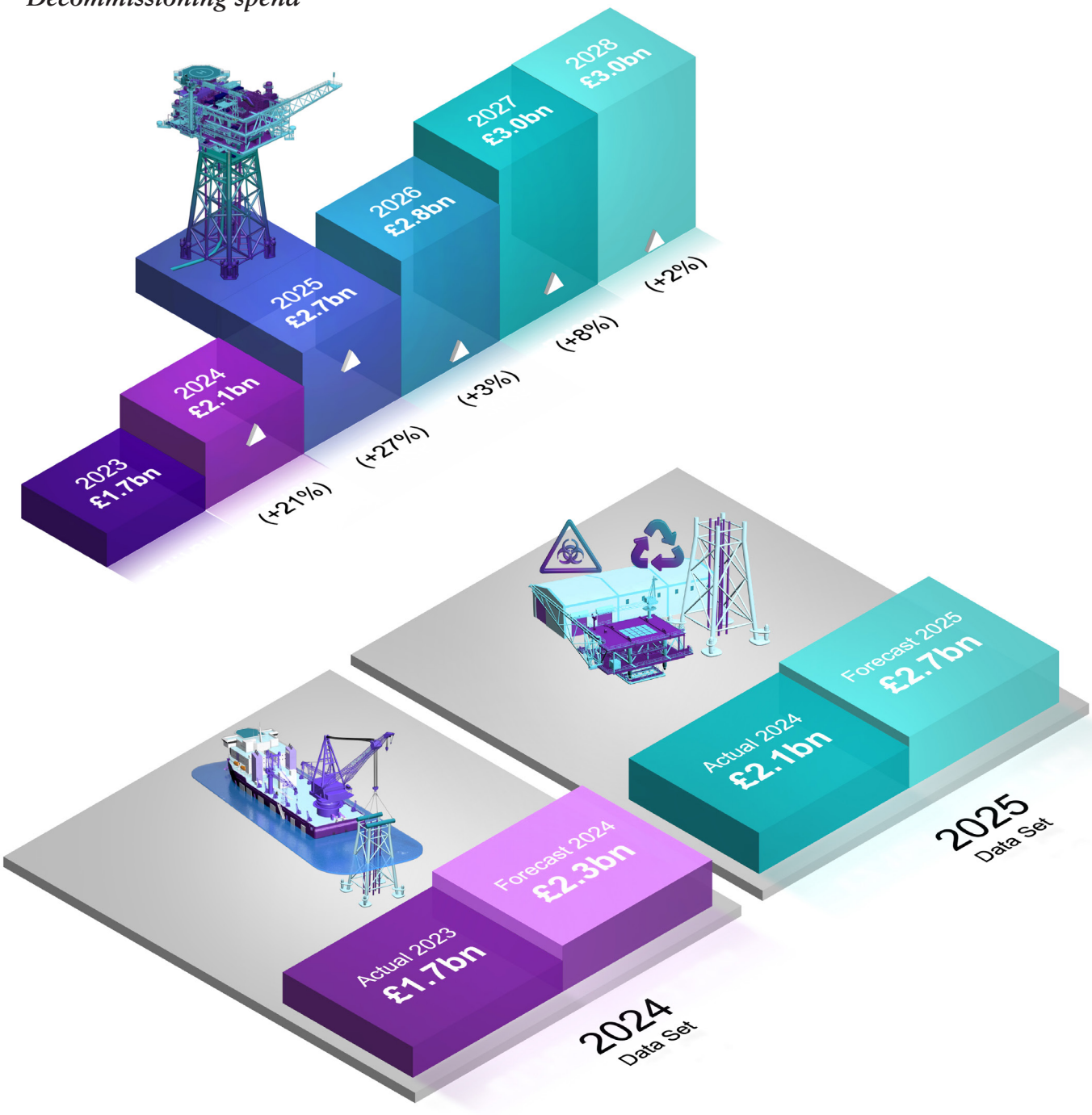
2025 Forecast



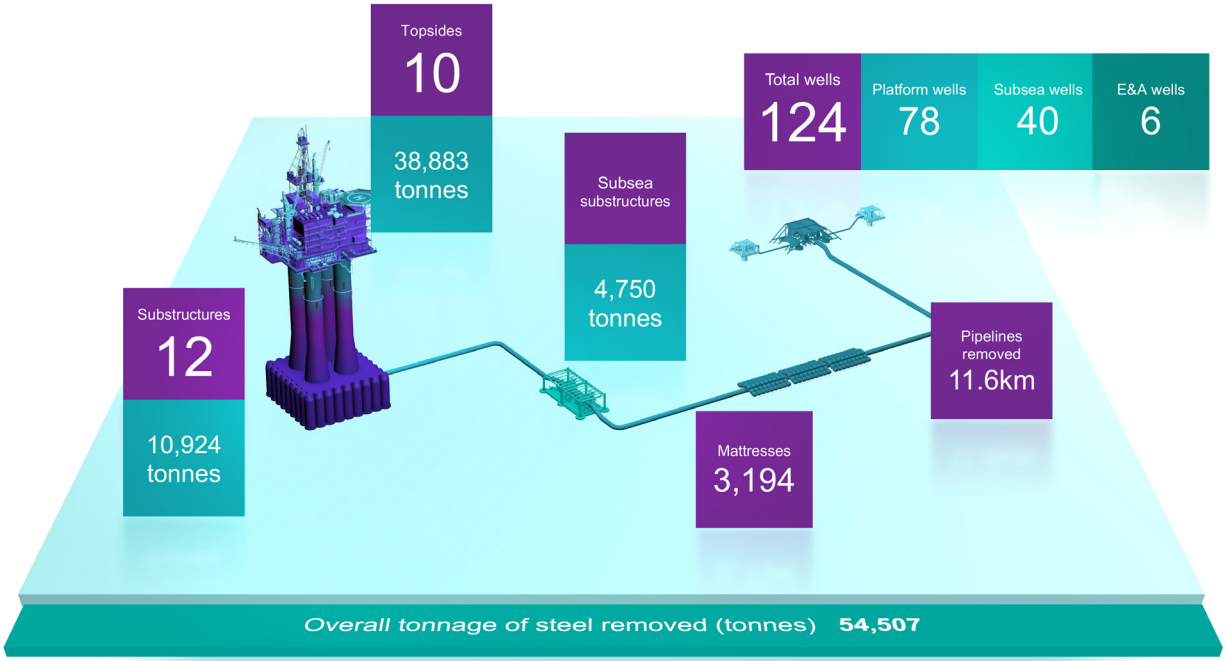
Decommissioning accounted for 15% of total oil and gas expenditure in the UKCS in 2024 and is expected to rise beyond 30% by the end of the decade. Based on the current forecasts, decommissioning spend could potentially overtake capital expenditure as early as 2028. This is concerning for operators and supply chain as the UK oil and gas sector faces challenges in terms of basin investment, and the decommissioning sector will prosper only if its growth is managed alongside, not in place of, continued capital investment in ongoing oil and gas production.

£2 billion in decommissioning spend is not just a figure – it signifies the UKCS operators' commitment to fulfilling decommissioning obligations and further fuelling activity across UK's award-winning supply chain.

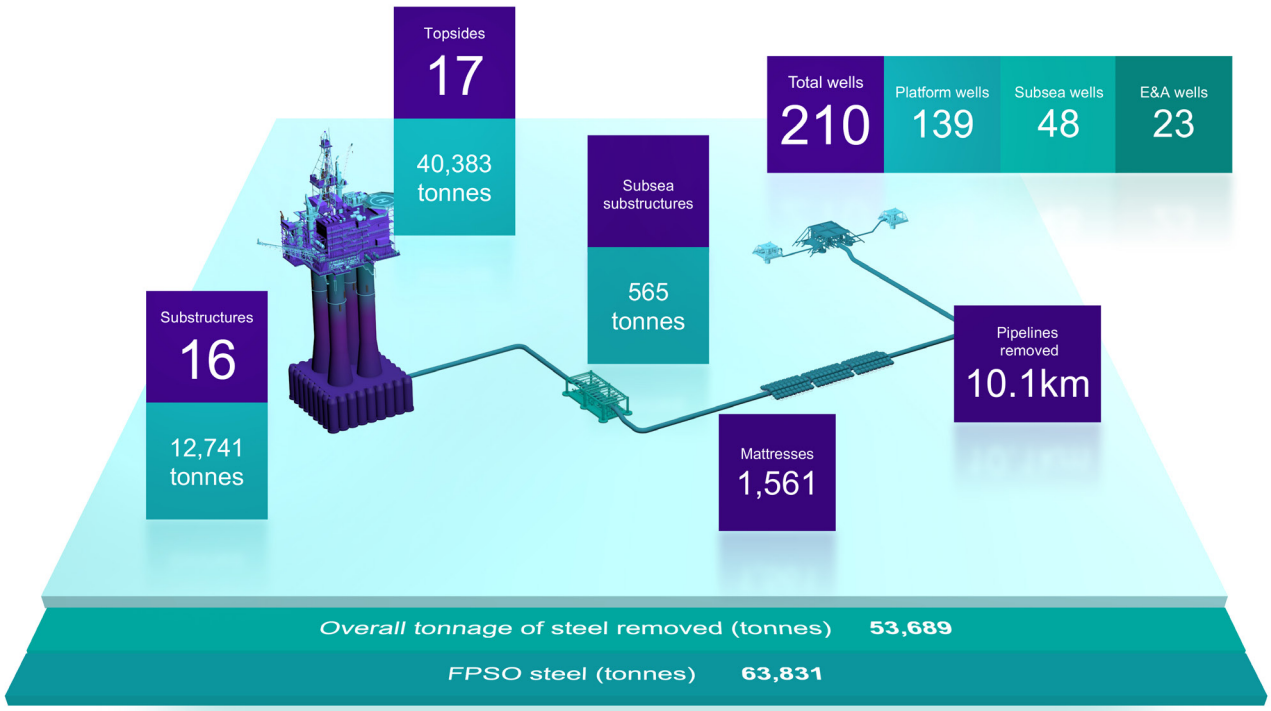
Decommissioning spend



Breakdown of removals 2024 (Actual)



Breakdown of removals 2025 (Forecast)



2.2 Forecast

Figure 1
10-year cost forecasts 2025-2034

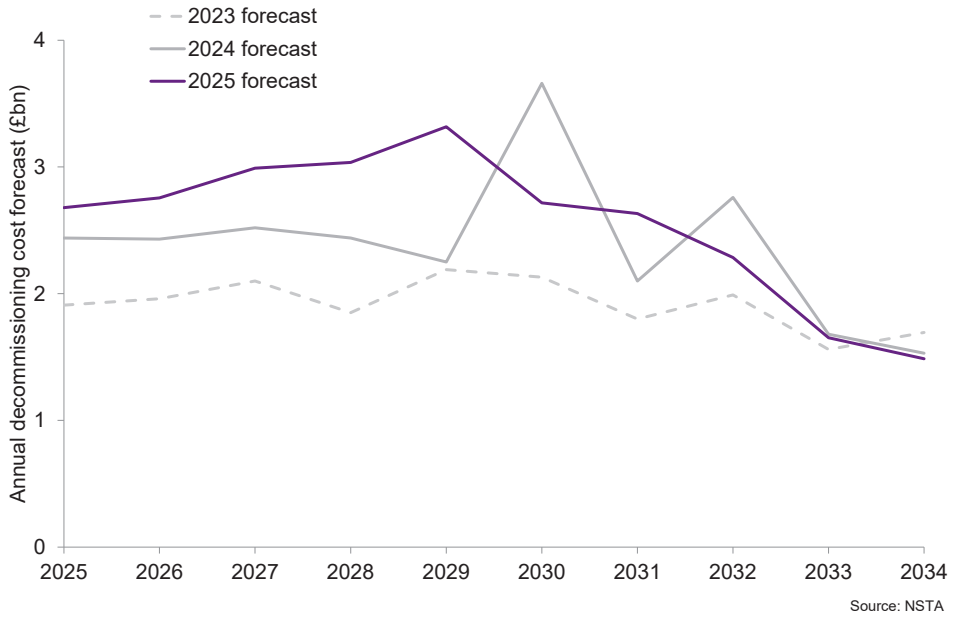
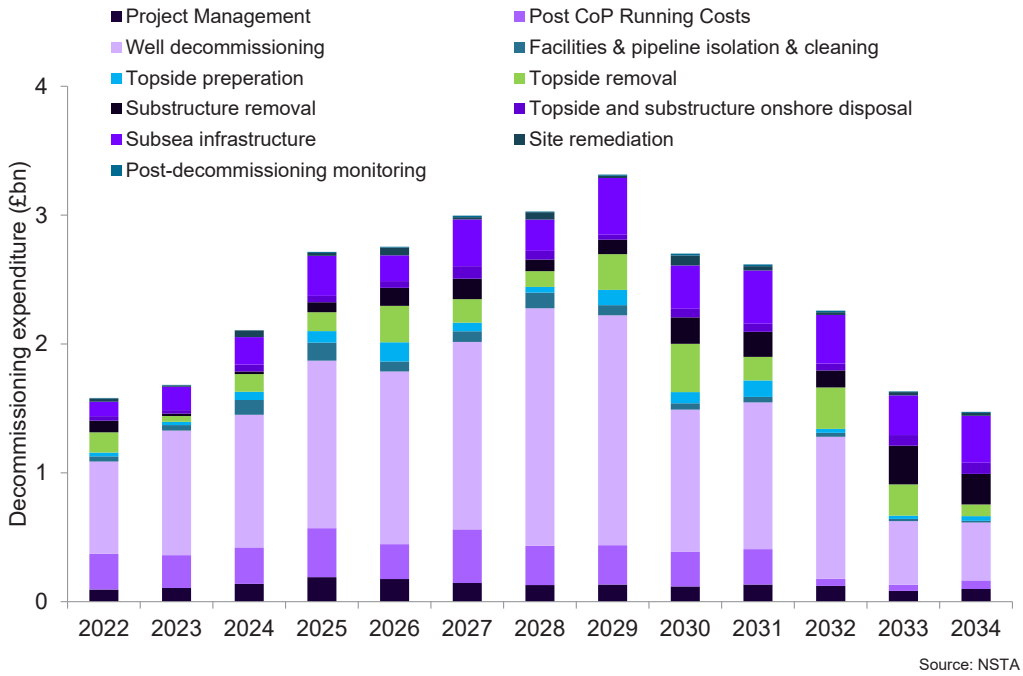


Figure 2
UKCS decommissioning expenditure by year



2024 – (21%) increase in spend

21% increase

15% of total basin spend was on decommissioning in 2024

15%

2024 – **Actuals is** £2.1bn: 9% less than forecasted

9% less

2025 – 2029 forecast £3 bn/year

£3 bn/year

21% rise in 2024 followed by a steadily rising 5 years averaging £3 bn

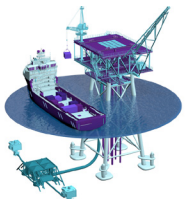
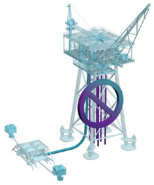
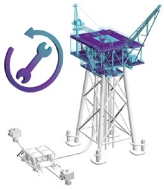
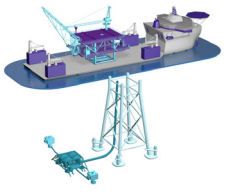
4% higher 10-year forecast spend rate than forecasted last year

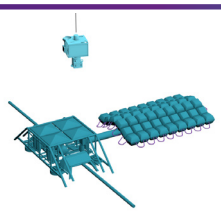
4% increase

NMC Energy

The UK's next decade of decommissioning

2.3 UKCS decommissioning expenditure, by work break-down structure 2025-2034

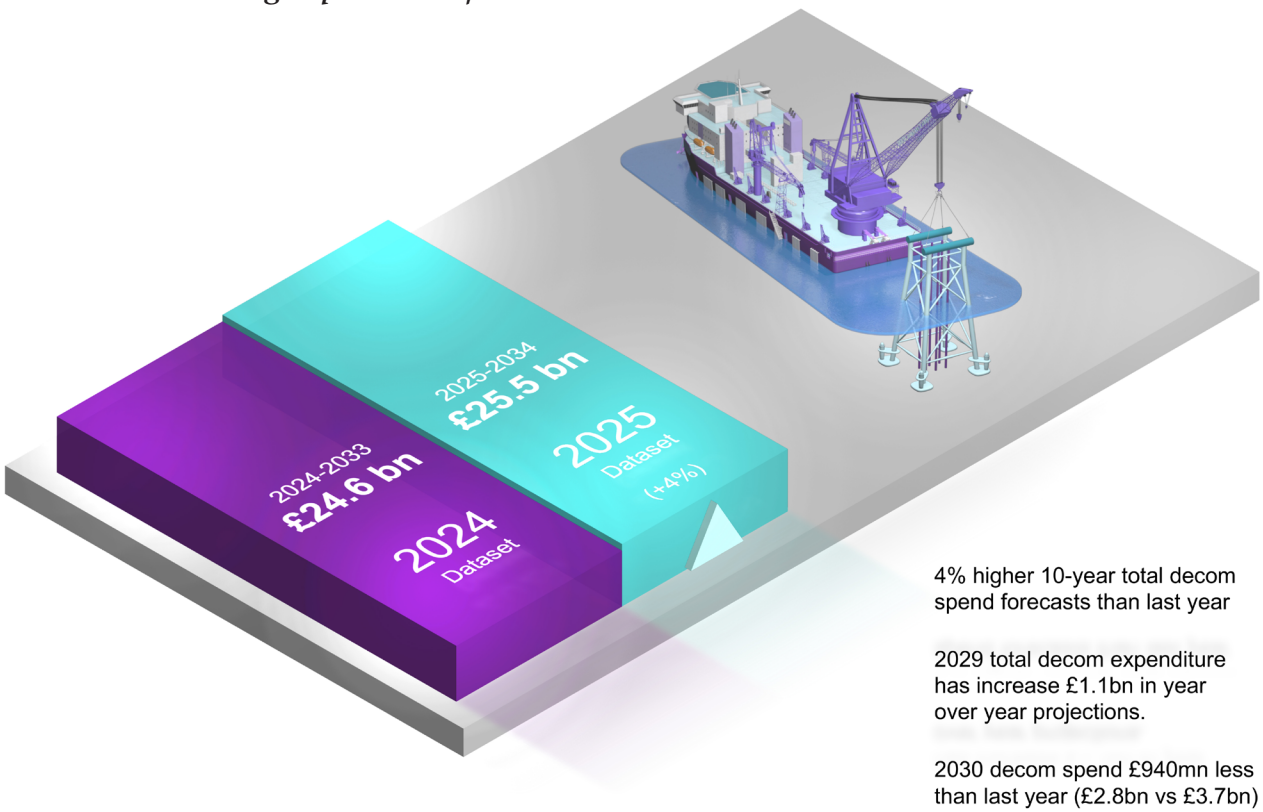
	Activity		Expenditure (£mn)				
			%	CNS	NNS & WoS	SNS & IS	Total
1		Project management	5.2%	£741	£366	£219	£1,326
2		Post-CoP running costs	9.4%	£1,476	£616	£301	£2,393
3		Well decommissioning	47%	£7,158	£3,113	£1,729	£12,000
4		Facilities & pipelines permanent isolation and cleaning	2.5%	£273	£284	£94	£651
5		Topsides preparation	3%	£367	£209	£199	£774
6		Topsides removals	8.7%	£1,099	£561	£566	£2,227

Activity			Expenditure (£mn)				
			%	CNS	NNS & WoS	SNS & IS	Total
7		Substructure removal	6.4%	£938	£268	£440	£1,647
8		Topsides and substructure onshore disposal	2.6%	£328	£211	£117	£656
9		Subsea infrastructure	13.4%	£1,920	£1,013	£479	£3,412
10		Site remediation	1.4%	£115	£104	£136	£356
11		Post decommissioning monitoring	0.4%	£44	£32	£20	£95
Totals (£bn)				£14.560	£6,778	£4,300	£25,538

Section 2.3 on the previous spread shows each element of the OEUK decommissioning WBS and the 10-year forecast associated with it. Once again, we see a significant increase in the forecast decommissioning spend over the next decade. The illustration below shows the year-on-year forecast spend by the UKCS region for decommissioning works for the next decade. Also depicted is the 10-year forecasted total expenditure which is predicted to rise once again. Last year's report showed an increase in decade spend by 19% and this year we have seen spend profiles increase by 4%. In 2024, decommissioning spend rose by 21%, raising concerns over a range of external factors that hindered the basin's ability to streamline expenditure - many of the cost saving initiatives enacted were rendered obsolete. This year paints a similar picture, with external pressures continuing to drive up costs, compounded by an increase in CoP being brought forward. While this may allude to a rise in immediate workload, transition pace in an already declining basin is a cause for concern, accompanied with the risks of further cost escalation.

As other regions around the world work to maximise oil and gas economic recovery, which in turn supports economic growth and lowers decommissioning costs, the UK seems to be at a standstill, causing supply chain and operator uncertainty, resulting in a hike in decommissioning costs. Decommissioning costs, potentially eclipsing capital investment as early as 2028, will push these growing costs to a critical and potentially unmanageable level.

Decommissioning expenditure forecasts



4% higher 10-year total decom spend forecasts than last year

2029 total decom expenditure has increase £1.1bn in year over year projections.

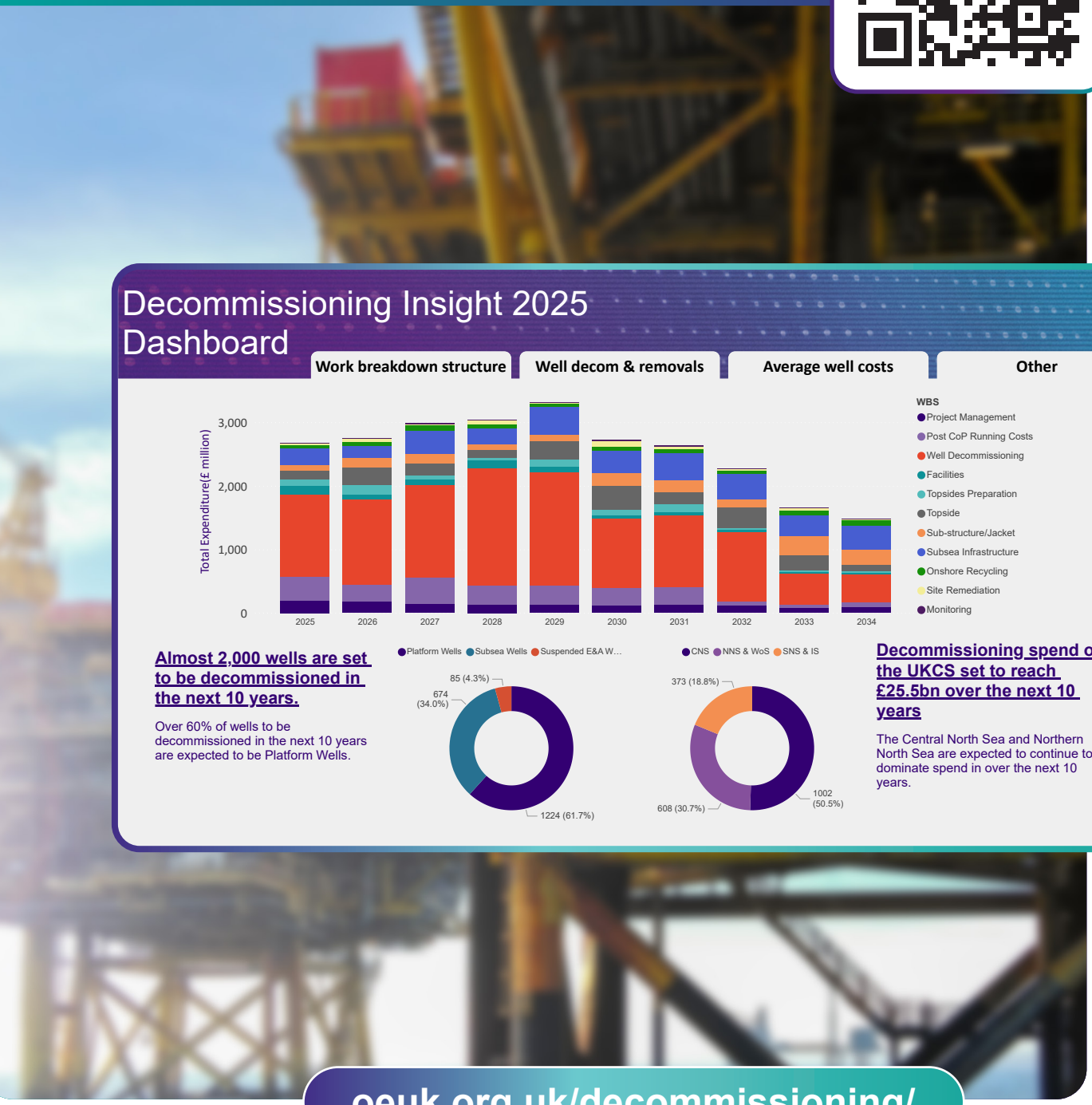
2030 decom spend £940mn less than last year (£2.8bn vs £3.7bn)

A fiscal shift, such as the immediate reform of the Energy Profit Levy (EPL) and replacement with an appropriate price mechanism with a focus on economic growth in the UKCS, could help stabilise decommissioning costs and support long-term basin viability. Despite the external pressures the UK has once again delivered an abundance of works and more spend than ever before. Multiple technical innovations and costs saving initiatives, including collaboration campaigns (operator to operator, supply chain to operator and supply chain to supply chain) have driven extensive savings, which would be abundantly evident with better market conditions.

The forecasted average annual decommissioning spend of £3 billion through to 2029 presents an extremely challenging target. While this correlates with the scale of the task ahead, it also underscores the urgent need to find ways to deliver more for less. Industry is actively pursuing cost-reduction initiatives, such as campaign-based approaches, technology deployment and further fine-tuned planning measures – but these collective efforts alone aren't enough. A nurturing fiscal environment is essential and the UK government must provide conditions that encourage planning confidence amongst operators and unlock investment; alongside ensuring the UKCS decommissioning legacy is characterised with efficiency, innovation and strategic long-term value.


EnQuest

For further insights see our OEUK Decommissioning insight dashboard



Decommissioning Insight 2025 Dashboard

Work breakdown structure | Well decom & removals | Average well costs | Other

Almost 2,000 wells are set to be decommissioned in the next 10 years.

Over 60% of wells to be decommissioned in the next 10 years are expected to be Platform Wells.

Decommissioning spend on the UKCS set to reach £25.5bn over the next 10 years

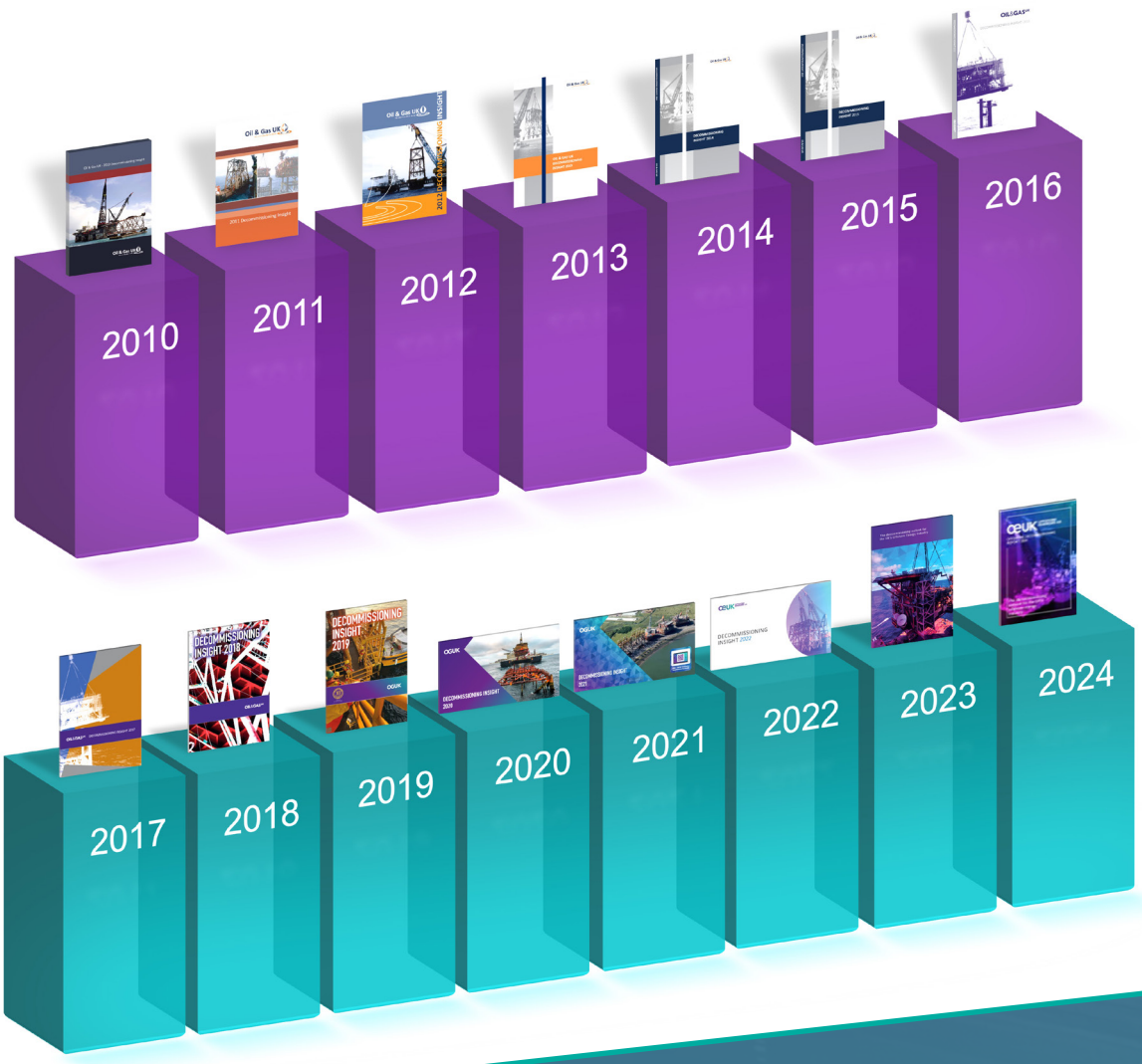
The Central North Sea and Northern North Sea are expected to continue to dominate spend in over the next 10 years.

oeuk.org.uk/decommissioning/

OEUK Decommissioning Insight Report History

Since the inaugural publication in 2010, the OEUK Decommissioning Insight reports have provided an authoritative annual overview of decommissioning activity, expenditure, and trends on the UKCS. The first report emerged at a time when the concept of large-scale offshore decommissioning was beginning to crystallise as a central strategic issue for the North Sea oil and gas sector. Early editions laid the groundwork by collating data from operators and supply chain partners, alongside forecasting the financial and operational challenges of removing aging infrastructure. Over the years, the reports became more sophisticated, incorporating lessons learned, case studies, and adopting increasingly granular regional breakdowns, while offering a critical lens on regulatory developments, environmental considerations, and the evolving fiscal environment.

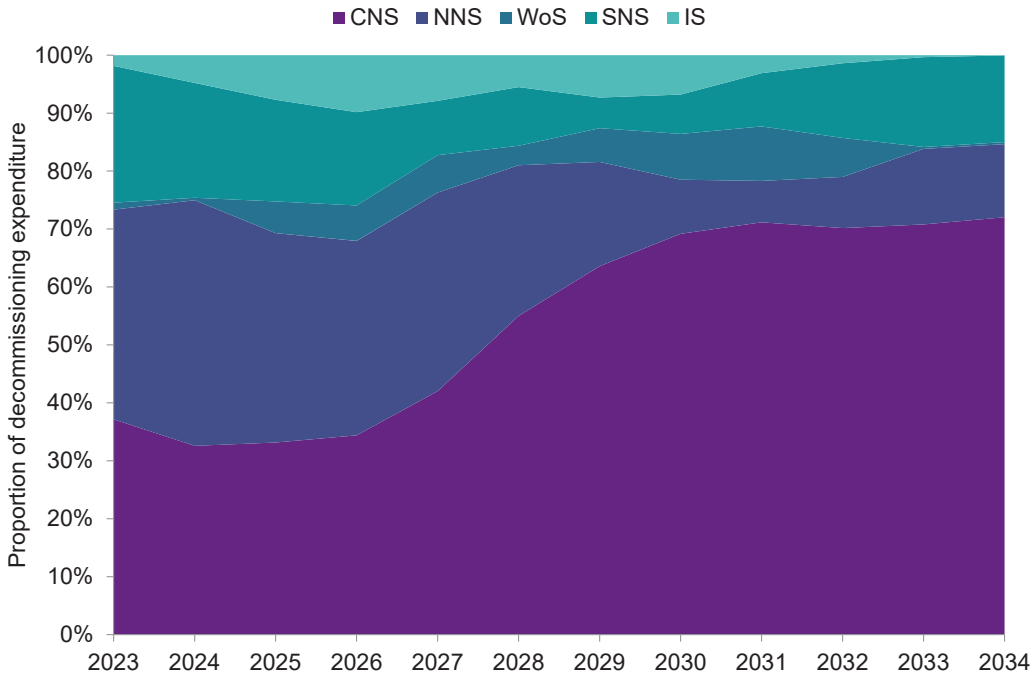
As the industry navigated external shocks—commodity price volatility, political uncertainty, and changing UK government policy—the Insight reports evolved to track these macroeconomic forces and their impact on decommissioning. In recent editions, a strong emphasis has been placed on technical innovations, collaboration campaigns, and cost-saving initiatives, reflecting the sector's efforts to counteract rising costs and supply chain pressures. Today, the OEUK Decommissioning Insight remains an essential resource for industry, government, and the wider public - mapping the journey from early projections to the current landscape where decommissioning is a dominant, complex, and rapidly shifting component of the UKCS energy story.



2.4 Regional trends

Decommissioning activity across the UKCS from 2025 to 2034 is shaped by a mix of regional dynamics and broader macroeconomic and political factors. From 2025 to 2034, the Central North Sea (CNS) is poised to become the focal point of decommissioning activity, with the Northern North Sea (NNS), West of Shetland (WoS), Southern North Sea (SNS), and Irish Sea (IS) each following distinct but interrelated trends. Macro factors, such as political stability, commodity pricing, fiscal policy and ongoing industry innovation, will remain critical in shaping the pace, scale, and cost-effectiveness of decommissioning across the UKCS.

Figure 3
UKCS regional expenditure



Regional subsea removals 2023-2027

	Subsea removals (tonnage)		
	CNS	NNS & WoS	SNS & IS
2023	6,013	60	189
2024	4,089	0	661
2025	341	95	129
2026	1,304	7,881	3,013
2027	5,242	12,158	790
Yearly average	3,398	4,039	956

Regional visibility across decommissioning projects is key to anchoring the supply chain in the UK. Between now and the end of the decade, the NNS and WoS are forecast to share £5.6 billion in decommissioning spend, underpinned by a steady workflow that will eventually decline into the mid-2030s. The CNS will experience a phased increase in activity, culminating in an upsurge towards the end of the decade and into the early 2030s. The SNS has made substantial progress in the preceding half-decade, with no immediate slowdown forecast - activity is due to continue rising over the next few years before tapering off into the mid-2030s. Efforts across the UK decommissioning community remain centred in identifying impactful operational efficiencies and rooted in commitment to delivering on its decommissioning obligations.

Figure 4
Work break-down structure by region 2025-2034

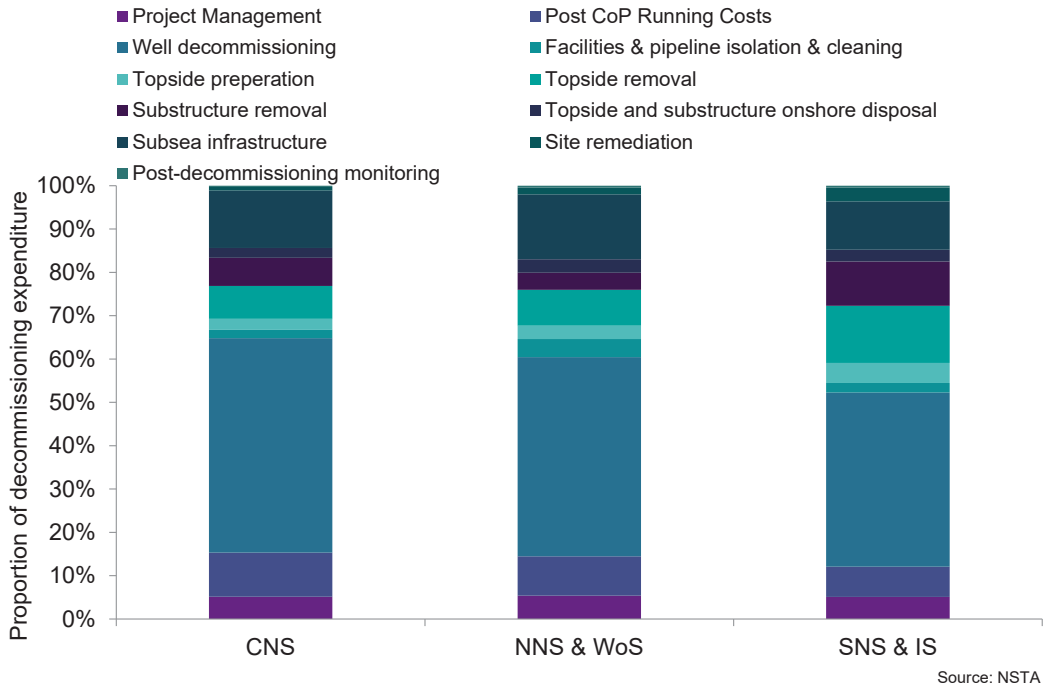


Figure 5a
Northern North Sea & West of Shetland

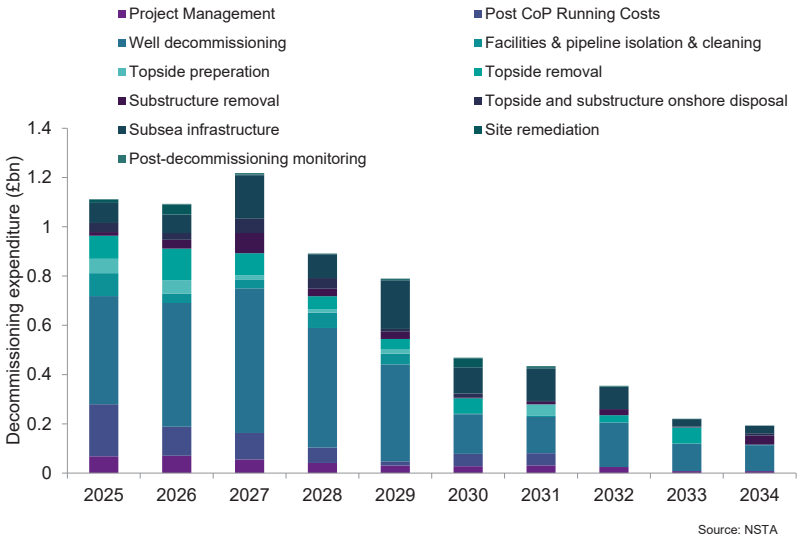


Figure 5b
Central North Sea

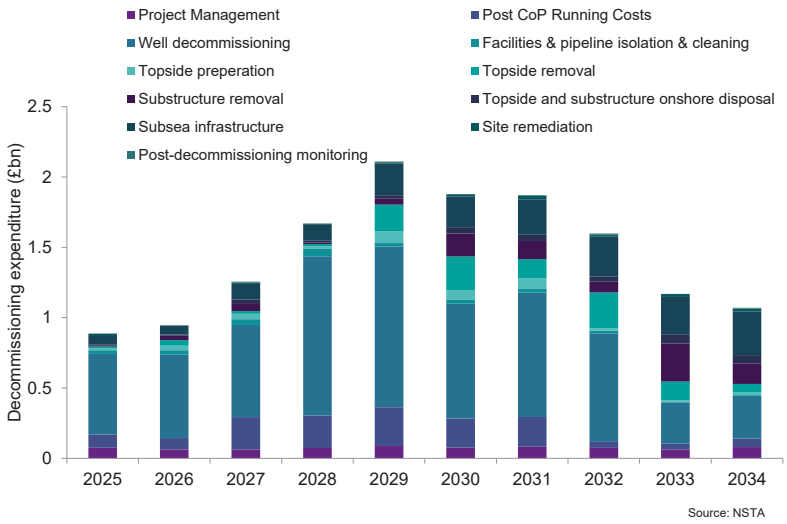
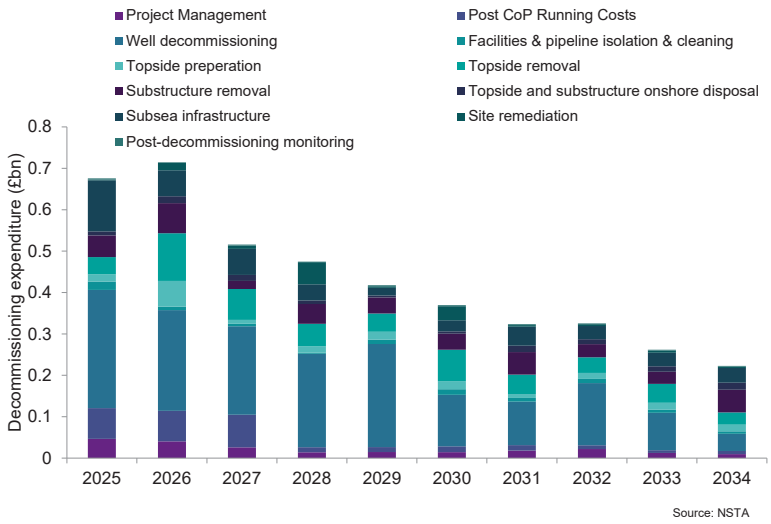


Figure 5c
Southern North Sea & Irish Sea



Northern North Sea (NNS): steadies the course in UK decommissioning trends

The NNS will maintain a steady, consistent workload throughout the period, with a gradual increase in activity as larger asset removals take place in the late 2020s.

The region's decommissioning profile reflects a stable but persistent demand, with workload intensifying in alignment with major asset decommissioning schedules.

West of Shetland (WoS): steady as planned, decommissioning on demand

Decommissioning in the WoS is expected to be consistent with previous forecasts, indicating a relatively stable cadence of work through the decade.

This region maintains a consistent workstream, supporting gradual resource allocation and sustained supply chain involvement.

Central North Sea (CNS): leading momentum in UK Decommissioning

The CNS is set to dominate the decommissioning market, with almost 60% of decommissioning spend projected to occur in the sub-basin over the next decade.

Currently, one-third of the total basin decommissioning expenditure is in the CNS, rising to 71% as major projects come online in 2031 and beyond.

A sizeable workload peak is anticipated in the late 2020s, driven by large-scale asset removals and ongoing well decommissioning.

45% of the basin's well activity will be concentrated in the CNS until 2030.

Southern North Sea (SNS) & Irish Sea (IS): riding the upsurge

The SNS is currently in an activity upsurge, set to continue beyond 2025, followed by a steady decline in workload towards the end of the decade and into the early 2030s

Significant topside and substructure removals are scheduled from 2025 to 2028, with 130,000 tonnes of infrastructure outlined to be removed during that period.

Wells have been the focus of activity, but a steep decrease in well decommissioning is predicted from 2026 onwards, alleviating pressure by enabling resource reallocation across other regions.

Subsea infrastructure removal will average 5,800 tonnes per year until the decade's end, indicating ongoing but diminishing work.

The Irish Sea trends are closely aligned with the SNS, with reductions in workload following the mid-decade peak.

3. Wells

Figure 6
UKCS well decommissioning

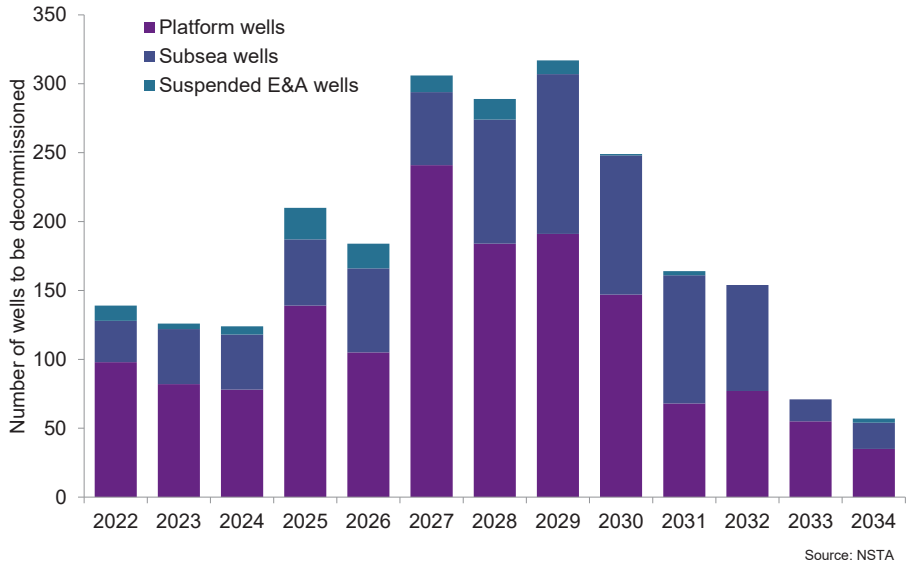
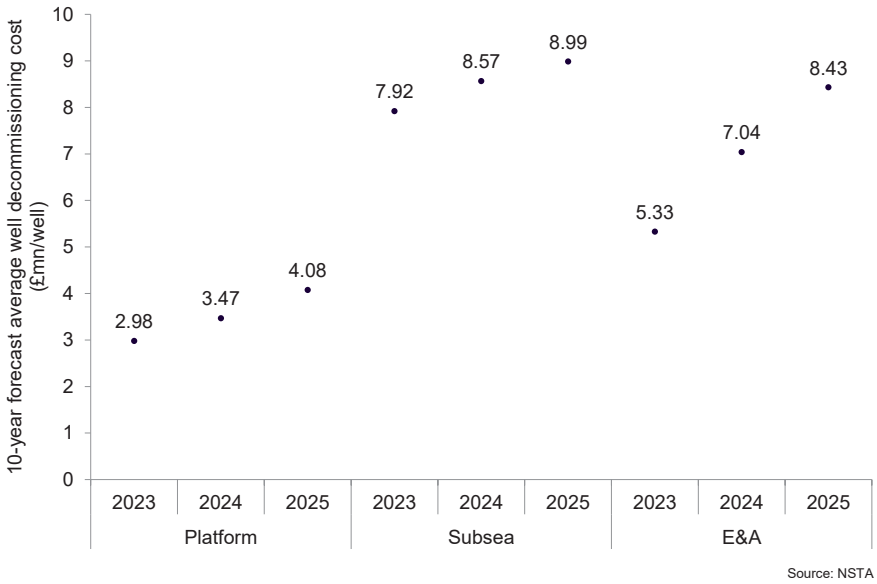


Figure 7
Estimated costs (mn) per well



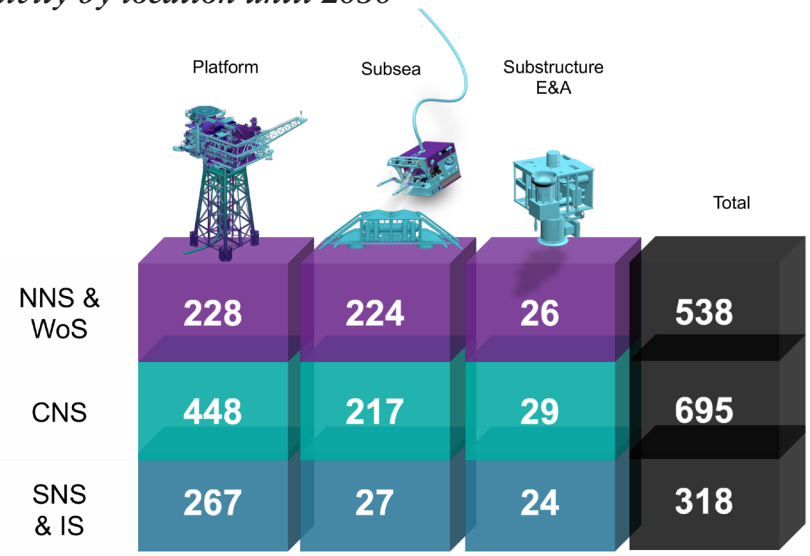
Keep plugging away: Since 2023, the UKCS well P&A landscape has seen notable changes, particularly in activity levels and cost structure. In 2024, well P&A activity fell by 3% compared to the previous year. Platform well P&A underperformed, with 78 wells completed - four fewer than in 2023 - falling short of projected levels. Many projects were deferred to 2025, driving a sharp forecast increase to 139 platform wells (+78%). Subsea well P&A activity held steady at 40 wells, consistent with 2023. Elsewhere, E&A well P&A again missed projections, largely due to the complexity of the wells.
Overall, significantly fewer well decommissioning were completed than forecasted. It should be noted that well decommissioning figures are based on fully abandoned wells. Significant works were completed to ensure that wells were safely, but not always fully, abandoned. Well abandonment is often completed in stages using different infrastructure to campaign efficiently and control costs.

Well activity by location over the next 10 years

51%

of well activity is in the central north sea over the next 10 years

Well activity by location until 2030



45%

of well activity is in the central north sea until 2030

Looking ahead, the focus will shift sharply towards platform wells, with 139 abandonments forecast for 2025—a step change that signals both increased opportunity and the need for careful equipment and personnel management. Subsea well decommissioning activity has been stable over the past 3 years, but is expected to increase throughout the remainder of the decade and the early 2030s, suggesting a buoyant market in the longer term. The complexity of E&A wells continues to present major challenges, causing actuals to fall short of forecasts, but the sector is actively addressing these hurdles through collaboration and innovation. The North Sea Transition Authority's (NSTA) cost report underscores the necessity for creating new contractual models between operators and the supply chain to unlock further efficiencies and future cost savings, even as broader inflation and fiscal uncertainty make the full impact of these gains difficult to quantify. The evolving environment points to a dynamic period ahead, marked by both challenges and opportunities in well decommissioning across the UKCS.

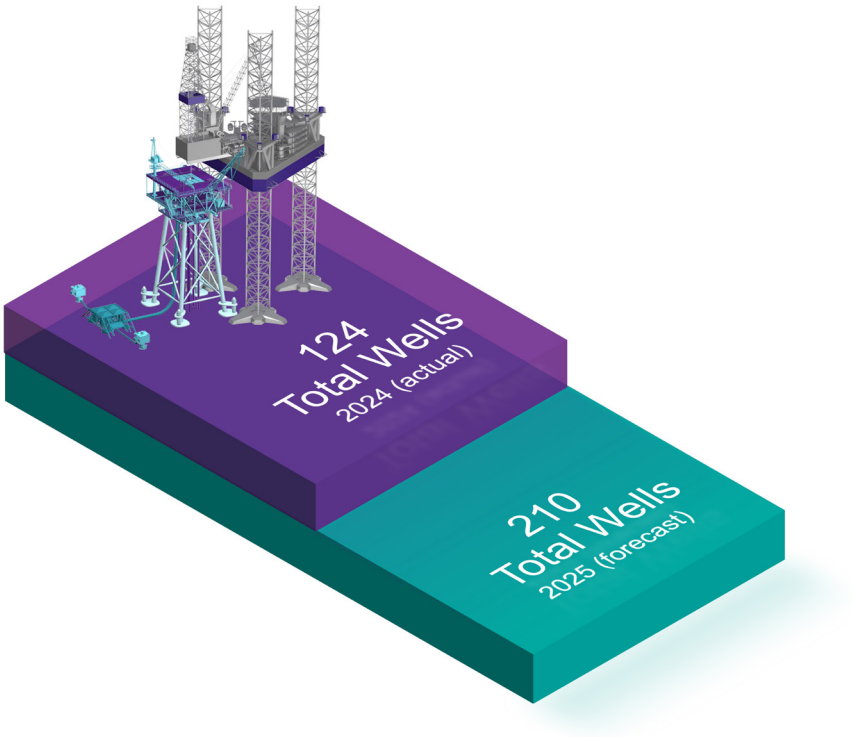
Number of decommissioned wells 2024 and 2025

Well decommissioning accounts for 47% of expenditure over the next decade.

Number of wells to be decommissioned in 2025 is 69% higher than in 2024. Achieving this will meet the forecast 200+ wells/year to meet the UKCS decommissioning objectives.

Decommissioning of subsea wells is expected to increase from 40 to 48 in 2025.

While decommissioning of platform wells is expected to see a large increase from 78 to 139 wells in 2025.



Plug and pay: The latest data, highlighted in the 2025 NSTA cost report and supported by recent cost tables, reveals a significant upward trend in well P&A costs across the UKCS. Since 2023, overall well decommissioning expenditure has surged, with the basin's cumulative cost estimate rising by £1 billion and expected to reach £12 billion by 2032. This figure underscores the escalating financial burden on operators, with P&A now comprising approximately half of total decommissioning costs. The average cost per platform well has climbed to £3.3 million —an increase of 10% over the past year—while E&A well costs have jumped by an average of 30% compared to 2023 forecasts. In contrast, subsea well costs have remained relatively stable, with increases below inflation, indicating some areas of improved cost control and efficiency.

Case Study: Operational Excellence in Multi-Well Decommissioning

The Well-Safe Protector successfully completed a multi-well abandonment project ahead of schedule and without any safety or environmental incidents. This achievement sets a new benchmark for operational excellence and collaborative execution in the sector.

Well-Safe Solutions, in collaboration with Spirit Energy, contributed to the successful plug and abandonment (P&A) of 5 platform wells on the York platform, located in the UKCS. On 8 June 2025, the Well-Safe Protector (WSP) jack-up rig mobilised from the Dutch sector to UK waters to interface with the York platform, a normally unmanned installation.

Well-Safe Solutions managed the scope, incorporating temporary lighting, fire and gas systems, and safe access via the rig's angel wing deck. The York P&A campaign achieved NSTA top-quartile performance and finished 35 days ahead of P50 estimates through effective planning, batched operations, and optimised skidding practices, enabling 6-hour BOP moves. Strong collaboration between Spirit Energy and Well-Safe Solutions ensured safe, low-cost delivery, supported by robust supervision and lessons learnt.

Multiple offline scopes, including XMT recovery, contributed to a delivery that exceeded industry benchmarks. One well featured an extended cement plug of 3,800 ft, with 151 bbl of cement continuously pumped - demonstrating technical excellence. Further to well operations, several platform scopes were completed off critical path including NAV aid changeout, Topsides EDC and Hazardous Area declassification, and pipeline activities. Notably, the 16" gas export pipeline - spanning 34km from the York platform to the Easington terminal - was successfully pigged and flushed using rig pumps, delivering 30,000 bbls of fluid to the terminal.

Key Achievements

5 wells successfully abandoned

Completed 35 days ahead of P50 estimated timings

Zero accidents, incidents or environmental occurrences

Exemplary rig up time – 98.7%

Platform shutdown scopes completed – 30,000 bbl pumped for multiple pigging and flushing operations

XMTs recovered offline

44,000 ft of tubing and casing recovery for wells

Operational Excellence

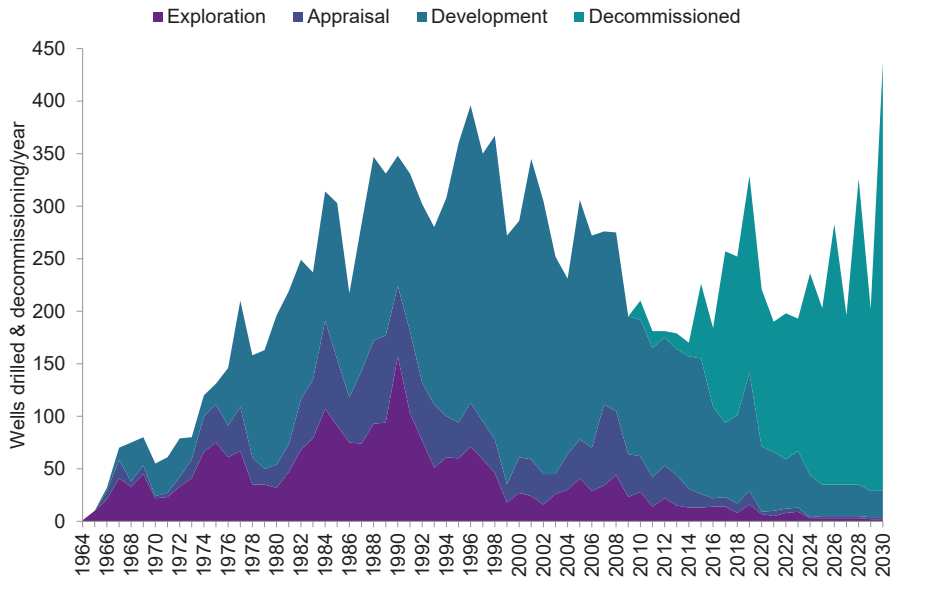
The campaign, spanning mobilisation, interface, and demobilisation, was completed in 61 days, finishing 35 days ahead of P50 estimates. This success is attributed to the meticulous planning, seamless coordination, and strong collaboration across onshore and offshore teams. Spirit Energy and Well-Safe Solutions' strategic foresight and SIMOPS precision sets a benchmark for efficiency and safety in complex decommissioning operations.

Despite these cost hikes, the market remains dynamic, shaped by both industry innovation and persistent macroeconomic challenges. The sector has responded to mounting financial pressures by deploying new technologies, innovative joint ventures, and experimenting with fresh contractual models between operators and the supply chain. However, the tangible impact of these initiatives on overall cost savings is difficult to quantify given ongoing inflation and fiscal uncertainty. Looking forward, a stable fiscal regime and continued investment will be essential to ensuring the supply chain can meet decommissioning obligations and drive an effective energy transition.

Decommissioning costs per well 2022-2025

Average cost per well (£mn)	2022	2023	2024	2025
Platform	2.56	2.98	3.47	4.08
Subsea	7.89	7.92	8.57	8.99
E&A	4.42	5.33	7.04	8.43

Figure 8
Well drilling and decommissioning activity



source: NSTA

The data illustrated in Figure 8 reveals a pronounced shift within the UKCS, where decommissioning operations are now outpacing well exploration, appraisal, and development activities by more than double—echoing a 220% increase in well decommissioning from 2022 relative to production-adding activity. This trend is underpinned by a series of external factors, including delayed exploration licence rounds, the introduction of the EPL, and prevailing political uncertainty, all of which have contributed to a tangible decline in the number of new wells being drilled. Meanwhile, the anticipation of earlier cessation of production (COP), partly attributed to the EPL suggests an accelerated trajectory for future decommissioning.

"As highlighted in both NSTA and OEUK analyses, the UK well Plug and Abandonment (P&A) landscape is characterised by rapidly increasing decommissioning activity—prompted by political factors such as the Energy Profit Levy (EPL), delayed licensing rounds, and broader market uncertainty. These pressures have caused well decommissioning to far outstrip new drilling, while also exposing the sector to escalating costs. To prevent further cost inflation, it is essential that market conditions stabilise and industry-wide collaboration is prioritised, ensuring knowledge sharing and efficiency gains are maximised across the sector."

Keith Wise- Operations Manager, OEUK

A significant increase in well decommissioning activity is projected for 2025, with forecasts rising from 124 wells in 2024 to an ambitious 210 wells in 2025. This leap is most notable in the number of platform wells, nearly doubling from 78 to 139, while E&A wells also see a marked rise from 6 to 23. Although subsea well closures are set to decrease slightly, the overall momentum signals a robust challenge and opportunity for the industry. The scale and complexity of these operations will require both innovative approaches and enhanced capacity across all segments.

Decommissioning wells activity and forecast 2025-2034

Meeting the 2025 forecast will demand a responsive and agile supply chain, capable of handling the surge in decommissioning workloads against a backdrop of persistent market pressures. Availability of specialised equipment, skilled personnel, and vessels will be critical, as will collaborative contracting models that foster efficiency and adaptability. With market uncertainty and regulatory changes continuing to influence activity, operators who invest in strategic partnerships and share expertise stand to gain, driving both cost control and delivery success in a fast-evolving landscape.

Well decommisioning actuals and forecast

Actual and forecast numbers of wells being decommissioned, by type	
2024 (actuals)	**2025 (forecast)**
124 wells, *of which:*	210 wells, *of which*:
78 platform	139 platform
40 subsea	48 subsea
6 E&A	23 E&A


Mermaid Subsea Services (UK)

Case Study: Vessel based well decommissioning

Exceed extended its proven track record of planning and management of vessel based well decommissioning in 2025 on behalf of a large UKCS Operator, alongside principal subcontractor, DeepOcean. This project involved the final decommissioning of a Southern North Sea exploration & appraisal well (E&A), a Central North Sea E&A well, and an operation to perform surveillance, monitoring and investigation works at a separate Southern North Sea E&A well.

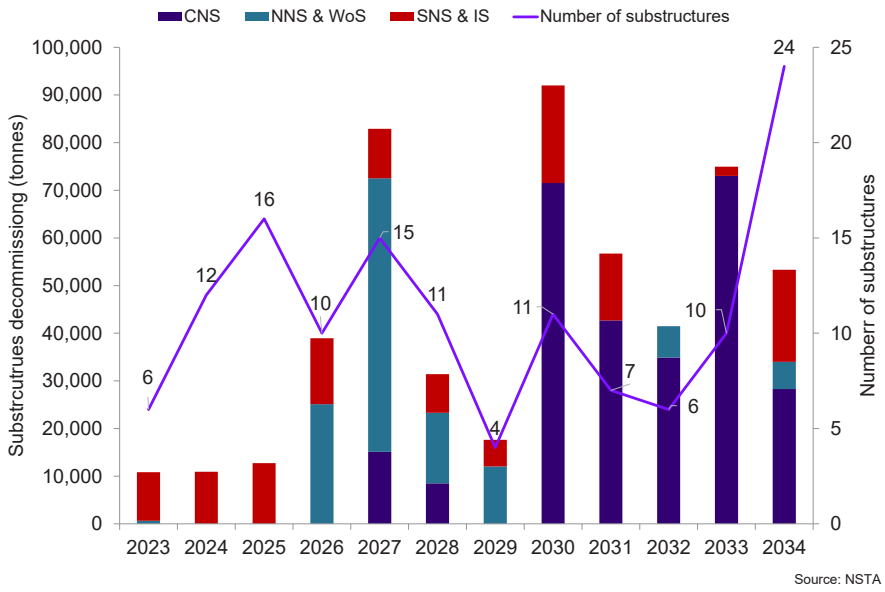
The well operations expertise of Exceed enabled optimisations to well decommissioning design to be implemented, specifically relating to environmental plug cementing operations. This optimisation eliminated the requirement for time- and equipment- intensive operations prior to cementing and allowed a more efficient cementing package to be selected. Combined, these improvements resulted in cost savings of ~£500k when compared to the conventional approach.

The streamlined deck package also provided an opportunity to maximise available vessel deck space, leading to cementing and abrasive wellhead severance operations in a single mobilisation. Overall, CAT 2.2 decommissioning operations, including dredging sediment to achieve wellbore access, and conductor severance at the SNS well location were performed in 1.8 days.

This project represented the second successful campaign of work undertaken by Exceed in collaboration with DeepOcean. The combination of well engineering and well projects 'know-how' of Exceed, with the industry leading vessel and subsea projects provision by DeepOcean continues to demonstrate success in executing efficient vessel based decommissioning operations.

4. Removals

Figure 9
Substructures to be decommissioned



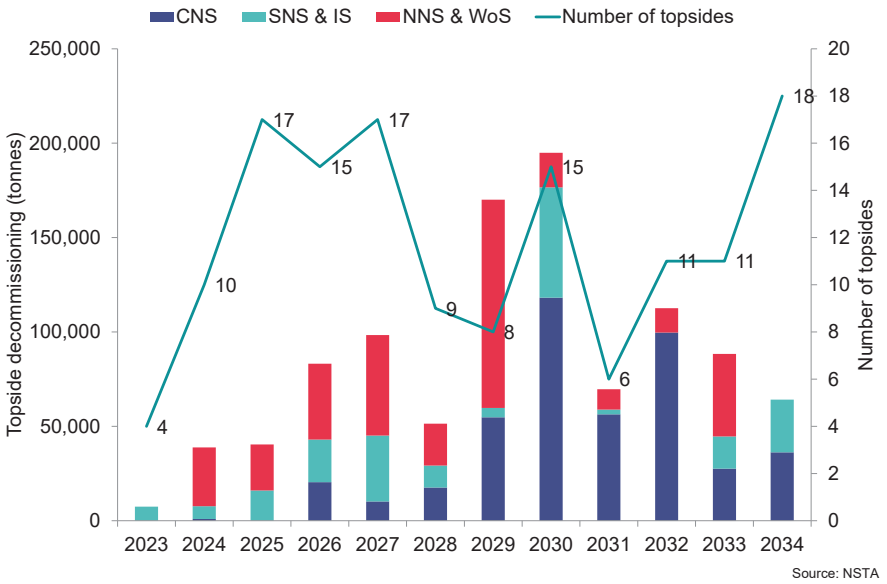
The future is bright with big lifts in sight: From 2024 onwards, the Southern North Sea (SNS) and Irish Sea (IS) are poised for significant activity in substructure decommissioning. While 2024 was another quiet year in this space, the forecast suggests a steady yet substantial workload in these regions through the following years. The annual substructure removal tonnage remains under 40,000 tonnes until 2027, reflecting a steady but manageable pace. However, starting in 2026, the decommissioning focus expands northward as larger substructures in the Northern North Sea (NNS) and West of Shetland (WoS) regions are scheduled for removal, marking a shift toward heavier lifts and more complex operations.

The outlook for substructure decommissioning indicates that while the SNS & IS will continue to dominate the volume of removals in the near term, the NNS & WoS will drive the overall tonnage upward from 2027 due to the scale of their infrastructure. In the Central North Sea (CNS), substructure removals are projected to remain relatively modest in scale over the coming years, with activity levels trailing behind those seen in the SNS and IS. However, as decommissioning in the region picks up pace toward the end of the decade, the CNS is expected to see gradual increases in both the number and complexity of substructures being targeted for removal.

Removals forecast 2025-2034

2025 – 2034 Forecast	NNS & WoS	CNS	SNS & IS	Total UKCS
Topsides removal	18	30	79	127
Total weight (tonnes)	336,224	441,105	195,917	973,246
Substructure removal	9	30	75	114
Total weight (tonnes)	121,646	274,071	106,376	502,093

Figure 10
Topsides to be decommissioned

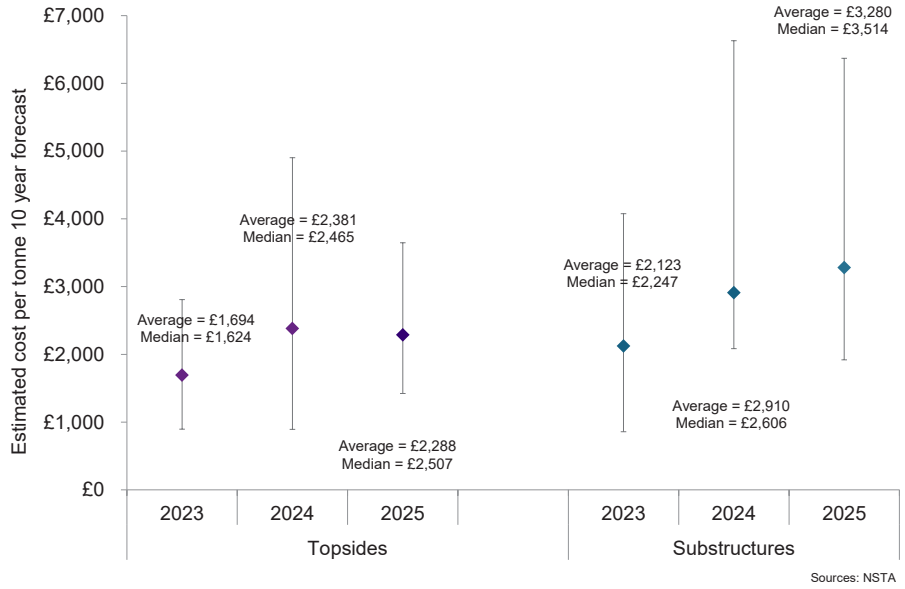


Topsides take-off: From 2025 onwards, the UKCS is forecasted to see a surge in topsides removal activities. These forecasted removals reflect a strategic shift in focus, with the SNS & IS regions leading in volume, while the NNS & WoS are expected to drive total tonnage higher through heavier lifts and more complex operations particularly from 2026 onwards.

The market faces significant pressures as the scale and complexity of decommissioning increases over the coming years. Larger topsides in the NNS and WoS regions will require specialised heavy-lift vessels, advanced engineering solutions, and robust project management to manage both environmental and logistical challenges. Simultaneously, the CNS is forecasted to experience gradual growth in activity nearer the end of the decade, presenting further technical demands on the supply chain. These pressures are compounded by the need to comply with environmental regulations and to optimise cost efficiency amid fluctuating commodity prices.

Despite these challenges, the forecasted uptick in removals offers substantial opportunities for the supply chain. Contractors, technology providers, and marine service companies can position themselves to deliver innovative solutions, capitalise on economies of scale, and forge long-term partnerships with operators. The regional breakdown in activity enables companies to plan targeted investment in infrastructure, workforce development, and collaborative initiatives, which in turn builds resilience and competitive advantage for the UK decommissioning sector.

Figure 11
Estimated cost per tonne



Rising costs and tightening resources: In the years leading up to 2024, the cost of removing a tonne of topsides has generally seen a downward trend, with an average decrease of 10% for two consecutive years. This reduction is chiefly attributed to ongoing technological improvements and enhanced project execution efficiencies—factors that have allowed operators to realise consistent savings. However, it is important to note that only a limited number of topsides removals occurred in 2023 , so broader cross-basin efficiencies may not have been fully tested or realised that year.

In 2025, the outlook is notably less optimistic. Forecasts indicate a modest increase in removal costs for substructures as costs are forecasted to jump by 13%. This anticipated escalation is driven by a combination of heightened market pressures, increased competition for heavy lift vessels, and the growing presence of renewable energy installations—particularly offshore wind within the UKCS. These factors are expected to push cost per tonne figures higher than seen in previous years, posing a substantial challenge for the industry to bridge the widening cost gap and adapt to a more competitive and resource-constrained market.

Case Study: EPRD (Engineering, Preparatory works, Removal, Transportation, Recycling and Disposal)

Date: January 2024 – August 2026
Vessel: SKANDI INSTALLER / SKANDI HERA
Location: 2 fields located in the Norwegian North Sea
Field 1: Northern Norwegian North Sea, Norway
Field 2: Central Norwegian North Sea, Norway
Recovery: 3500 tonnes
Water Depth: 400m

DOF was contracted for the largest decommissioning project the company has undertaken to date in the Norwegian North Sea. The project spanned oil and gas fields, and the full spectrum of engineering, procurement, recovery and waste management of over 3500 tonnes of subsea structures and materials – also including pipelines and umbilicals, requiring circa 180 vessel days to complete.

The Challenge

Field 1 saw DOF tasked with the complex EPRD of approximately 250m of high-grade, trenched production pipeline. Historically, the industry solution for this has been to use a diamond wire saw; however, this was found to be slow by nature and is accompanied by a number of operational challenges. The expert DOF team opted to use a large subsea shear to make the necessary cuts. Due to the absence of a representative pipe section for onshore testing, this choice proved to be a success with a positive operational outcome. The subsea shear methodology to cut the pipe significantly reduced vessel time and quantity of operational tasks, including mitigation for dredging, thus providing commercial, schedule and HSE benefits to the project.

Recovery and waste management of:

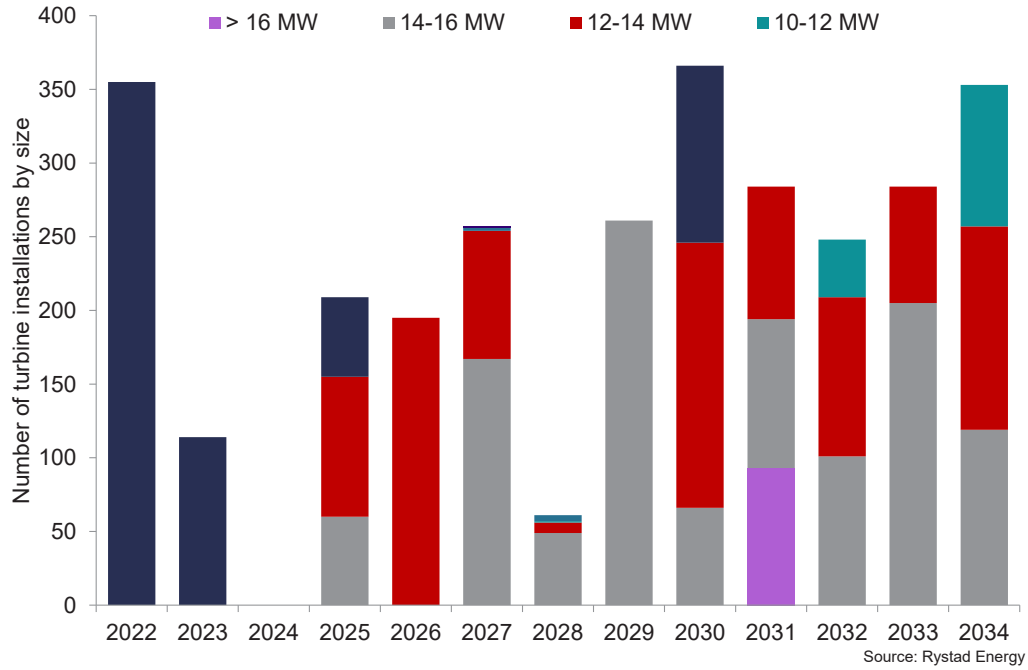
Field 1, circa 80m water depth

- 2 XMT's
- 112 concrete mattresses
- 2 well head protection structures
- 8 steel pin piles
- 2 well heads
- Umbilicals
- 12" Pipe in Pipe pipeline

Field 2, circa 400m water depth

- 2500 m3 dredging of rock
- 7 XMT's
- 44 GRP covers
- 3 Water injection wellheads
- 4 Production wellheads
- 12 FPSO hold back and hold down suction can anchors
- SSIV
- SDU
- Gas Export PLET
- FPSO Towhead
- Template Towhead
- Protection structures
- Water injection and Production manifolds
- Foundation Bottom Structures
- Flowlines
- Umbilicals
- Electrical flying leads

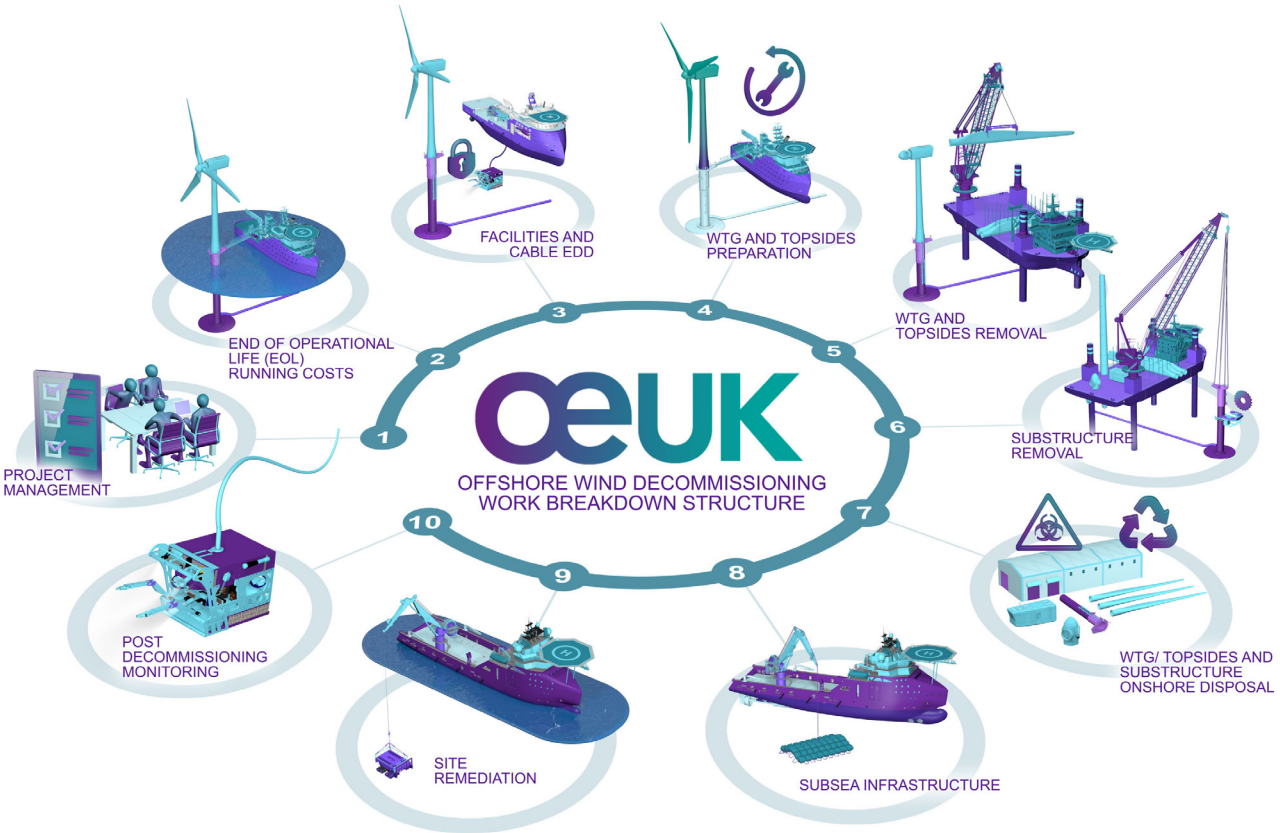
Figure 12
Turbine additions (by capacity)



Integrated energies- decommissioning in the energy transition: The UK offshore wind sector is experiencing an unprecedented surge in new installations, with levels of activity in the late 2020s expected to reach heights not previously seen in the region . This expansion is fuelling intense competition for critical supply chain resources, particularly heavy lift vessels, skilled personnel, and specialist engineering capacity. As the demand for offshore wind projects accelerates, the oil and gas decommissioning sector finds itself facing rising costs. The convergence of these two sectors is straining logistics, vessel availability, and workforce planning, threatening the timely and cost-effective delivery of both energy transition goals and safe legacy asset removal.

Given these pressures, cross-sector collaboration is not just advantageous but essential. The oil and gas and offshore wind industries must coordinate to ensure visibility in work scopes, share assets, and facilitate skills transfer, building a resilient and adaptable supply chain. A phased energy transition—where all forms of energy, from hydrocarbons to renewables, are inclusively managed—will be crucial for maintaining operational stability and meeting decarbonisation targets. Fiscal certainty is equally vital; without stable policy and investment frameworks, supply chain businesses will be unable to invest or innovate to meet the dual challenges. As OEUK highlights, fostering deeper integration, open dialogue, and joint planning across the energy sector is key to unlocking industrial growth and safeguarding UKCS competitiveness.

Wind decommissioning, though a nascent market, is rapidly approaching the same scale and complexity that oil and gas have managed for decades. Planned projects over the next decade underscore the necessity of transferring vital lessons and best practices, especially around cost estimation, risk management, and environmental stewardship. The OEUK Offshore Wind Decommissioning Guidelines, published in 2024, specifically call for leveraging oil and gas expertise to avoid pitfalls and accelerate learning curves in the wind sector. Sharing experience in logistics, vessel management, and regulatory compliance is crucial, particularly as large-scale wind decommissioning projects commence. As the UK advances toward net zero, a unified and staged transition, underpinned by robust cross-sector collaboration and fiscal clarity, will ensure the nation capitalises on the capabilities and capacities of its world-leading supply chain.



6. Subsea decommissioning

Figure 13
Subsea infrastructure removals

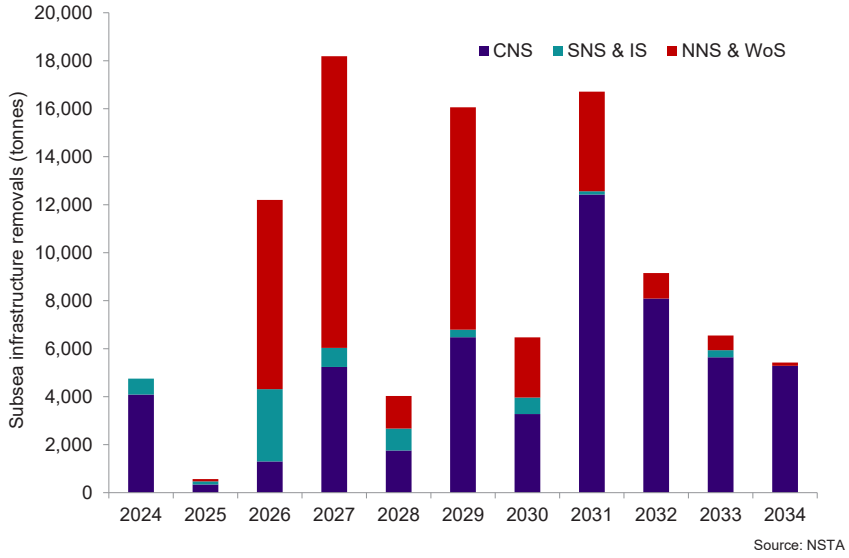
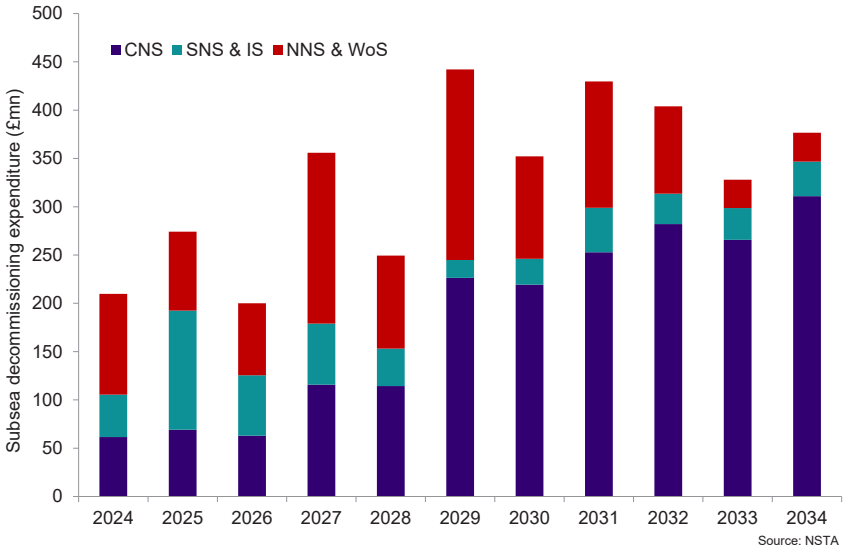


Figure 14
Forecasted subsea expenditure



The latest data from Figure 13 and Figure 14 reveals a marked escalation in subsea infrastructure removal activities and corresponding decommissioning expenditure across the UKCS. Actual figures from 2024 demonstrate over 4,000 tonnes of subsea infrastructure removed, a reduction on previous year's totals, alongside the extraction of 3,194 mattresses and the decommissioning of 309 km of pipelines. Forecasts for 2025 anticipate a significant drop in tonnage of infrastructure removed but with expenditure expected to rise significantly (30%). Looking ahead, the period from 2026 to 2033 will see an extraordinary surge, with projections of 9824 km of pipelines to be decommissioned and over 10,000 tonnes of infrastructure removed annually on average, shared mostly by the NNS & WoS and CNS. This massive escalation underscores a pivotal transition point for decommissioning, with spend set to reach record levels, exceeding £400 million per year at its peak.

This unprecedented scale of activity will place substantial demands on the UK supply chain, presenting both opportunities and challenges. Competition for specialist assets, such as vessels, experienced personnel, and innovative engineering solutions, will intensify, particularly as offshore wind decommissioning begins to overlap with oil and gas. The supply chain's historic strengths in subsea expertise, logistics, and mattress repurposing, as exemplified by recent innovations, position it to capture significant value, provided there is strategic investment and workforce development. However, capacity constraints, inflationary pressures, and the need for cross-sector collaboration remain acute risks. According to the NSTA's latest supply chain mapping, sustained engagement between operators and suppliers will be essential to ensure timely project delivery and maintain the UK's global competitiveness in the decommissioning arena.

Regionally, the CNS, NNS, and WoS will dominate subsea removals activity and expenditure, collectively capturing the majority share of project scope and capital outlay. The SNS and IS will also see increased activity but will account for a smaller proportion of the total spend and infrastructure removal. The upsurge in subsea decommissioning will drive new contract opportunities for UK-based firms, particularly in regions with established supply bases and technical capabilities.

Key hubs such as Aberdeen, Great Yarmouth, and Newcastle are poised to benefit directly from increased subsea infrastructure removals, leveraging their established supply chain ecosystems and skilled engineering workforces. Aberdeen, as the traditional heart of the North Sea energy sector, will see heightened activity in project management and subsea technology, while Great Yarmouth and Newcastle are set to capitalise on their offshore logistics and fabrication capabilities. These centres will play a pivotal role in mobilising assets, developing workforce expertise, and fostering the cross-sector innovations necessary for safe and efficient decommissioning at scale.

OEUK's insights emphasise the necessity for robust government policy, fiscal certainty, and agile supply chain strategies to fully capitalise on this generational opportunity, ensuring the UK remains a world leader in safe, efficient, and cost-effective offshore asset decommissioning.

Planned removal activity 2025-2034

2024 (actual)	2025 (forecast)	Activity from 2025-2034
11.6 km	10.1 km	883 km pipelines planned to be removed
4,750 tonnes	565 tonnes	95,350 tonnes of subsea structures to be removed
3,194 mattresses	1,561 mattresses	30,218 mattresses to be removed

7. Onshore dismantling and reuse opportunities

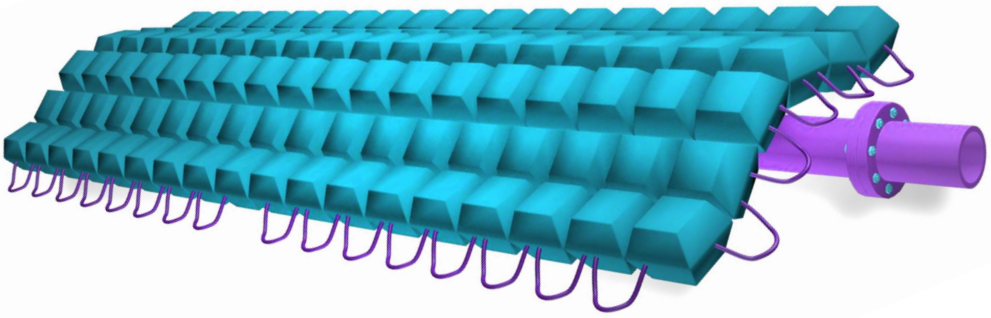


Figure 15a
Mass of infrastructure coming onshore

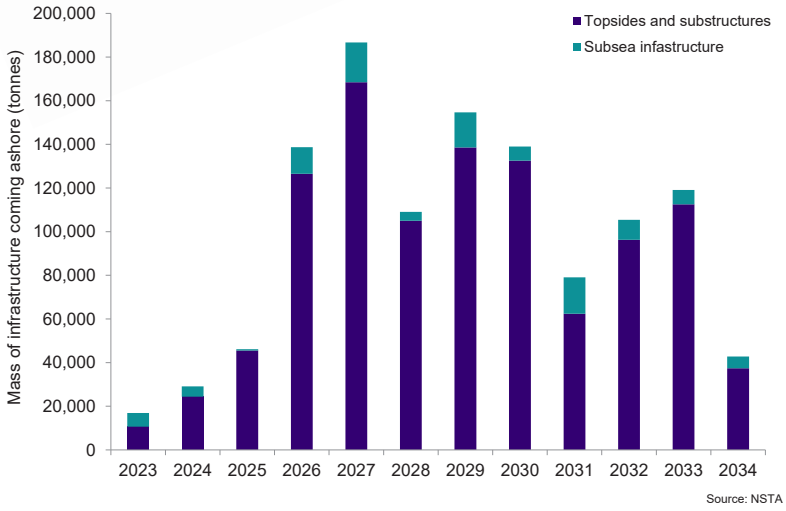


Figure 15b
Quantity of mattress removals

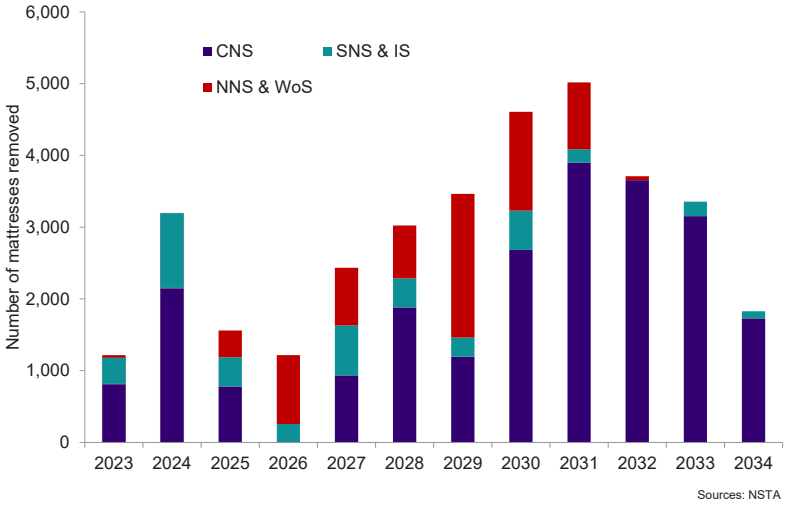


Figure 15a highlights the substantial mass of infrastructure anticipated to come onshore in the coming years, signalling a period of rapid expansion for the UK's onshore deconstruction market. With forecasts indicating that over 100,000 tonnes of subsea, topsides, and substructure assets will be brought to UK shores annually from 2026 onwards, regional yards and the supply chain find themselves at the threshold of unparalleled opportunity. This influx provides the momentum needed to transform UK onshore dismantling into a centre of excellence, provided proactive collaboration between supply chain participants and operators is maintained. The challenge will be in scaling up capacity, investing in workforce development, and coordinating logistics to ensure the UK captures as much of this value as possible.

Turning to Figure 15b, the recent surge in mattress removals demonstrates a dynamic shift in decommissioning practices, with the UK supply chain leading the charge. From 2022 to 2023, mattress removals have consistently surpassed 1,000 units per year, and 2024 saw over 3100 mattresses removed. This remarkable growth not only underscores the operational capabilities of the UK sector but also brings to the forefront the need for innovative solutions in the re-use and recycling of decommissioned mattresses. Already, UK companies are experimenting with various repurposing approaches, paving the way for scalable, circular economy solutions.

Globally, mattress repurposing is gaining traction as a sustainable practice. For example, in Norway and the Netherlands, end-of-life offshore mattresses are being converted into soundproofing panels and playground surfaces. The UK stands at a crossroads: by adopting and further innovating on these overseas approaches, the UK supply chain can not only reduce landfill dependency but also establish itself as a leader in offshore waste repurposing and circular economy performance.


AquaTerra

Global Case Study: TX-10,000 – Complex Structure Removals, Gulf of America

Overview

Xenos Marine completed a complex decommissioning campaign in the Gulf of America using the Heavy Lift Vessel TX-10,000. The project involved removing multiple offshore structures with topsides exceeding 2,000-tons and jackets over 3,000-tons. The offshore assets, over 50 years old, were in extremely poor structural condition, requiring innovative and adaptive removal strategies.

Challenge

The deteriorated condition of the platforms presented significant safety and engineering challenges. Corrosion, section loss, and compromised load paths prevented the use of conventional single-point lifting methods. Structural uncertainty required a flexible solution that could accommodate variable weight distribution and offset centers of gravity.

Solution

The TX-10,000, with a 7,500-ton capacity and four-block lifting system, provided the flexibility and contingency required for the campaign. Multi-point, determinant lift arrangements were developed to distribute forces evenly and mitigate overstressing in weakened components. This capability allowed the team to safely control each lift while managing unknowns in structural integrity.

Execution

Topsides were lifted in large sections, secured to the TX-10,000, and transported to an approved disposal facility for dismantling and recycling. Jackets were severed, lifted, and relocated to designated reefing sites, where they were toppled as part of the Gulf of America's artificial reef program, enhancing marine habitats and supporting long-term environmental goals.

Outcome

The operation was completed incident-free, on schedule and under budget, despite significant structural degradation. The campaign demonstrated the TX-10,000 and Xenos's capability to perform heavy, complex removals safely and efficiently while delivering sustainable end-of-life solutions.

Conclusion

This project reaffirmed Xenos Marine's position as a leader in offshore heavy-lift and decommissioning, showcasing the TX-10,000's ability to execute challenging removals safely, responsibly, and with precision.

8. The Wider North Sea

8.1 North Sea decommissioning

Figure 16a

Well decommissioning in the North Sea

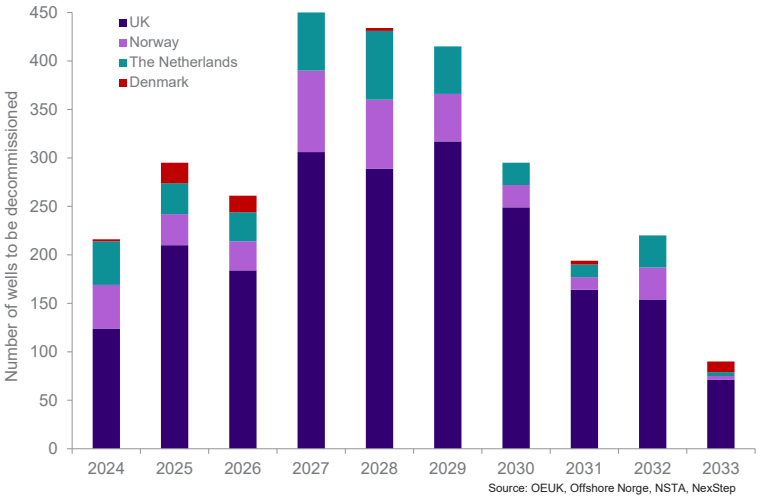


Figure 16b

Topsides mass decommissioning in the North Sea

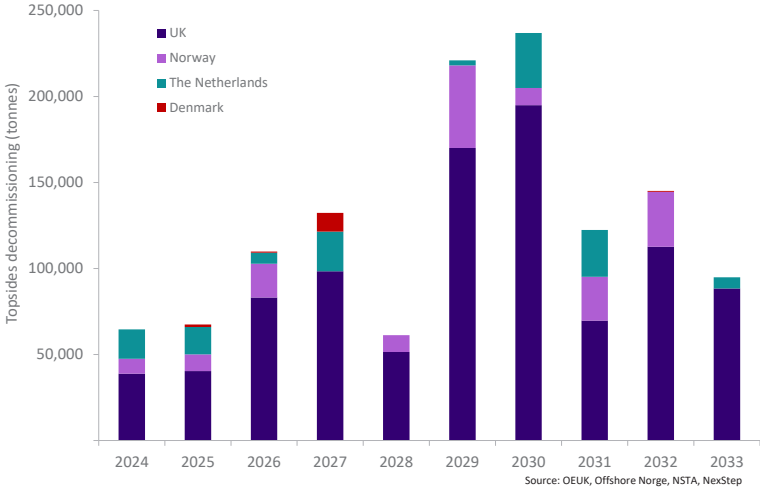
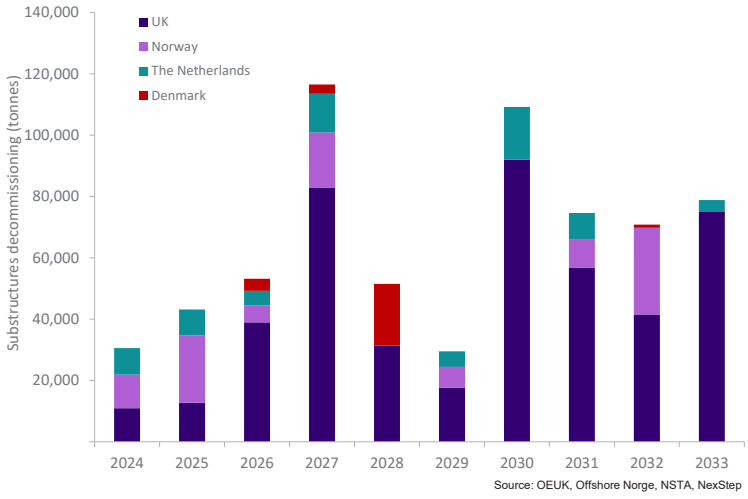


Figure 16c

Substructure mass decommissioning in the North Sea



Removal totals by country

Country	Wells	Topsides	Substructures
UK	74%	75%	70%
The Netherlands	14%	10%	11%
Norway	10%	13%	15%
Denmark	2%	1%	4%


AF Offshore Decom

8.2 The Netherlands

The Netherlands: 2025-2034 decommissioning

Number of wells to be decommissioned: 384 of which:
Platform wells: 301
Subsea wells: 16
Suspended E&A wells: 67

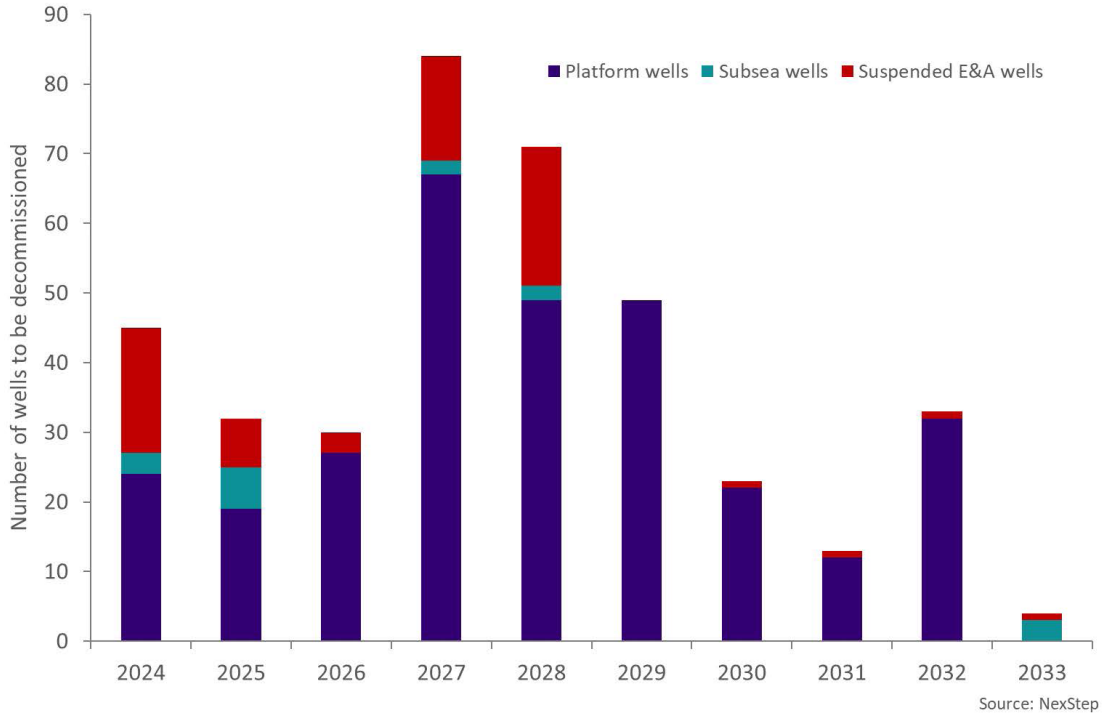
Topsides tonnage to be removed:
131,132

Substructure tonnage to be removed:
69,311

Pipelines to be decommissioned:
1,455 km

Umbilicals to be decommissioned:
282 km

Figure 17
Netherlands well decommissioning



8.3 Norway

Norway: 2025-2034 decommissioning

Number of wells to be decommissioned: 283 of which:
Platform wells: 220
Subsea wells: 63

Topsides tonnage to be removed:
163,288

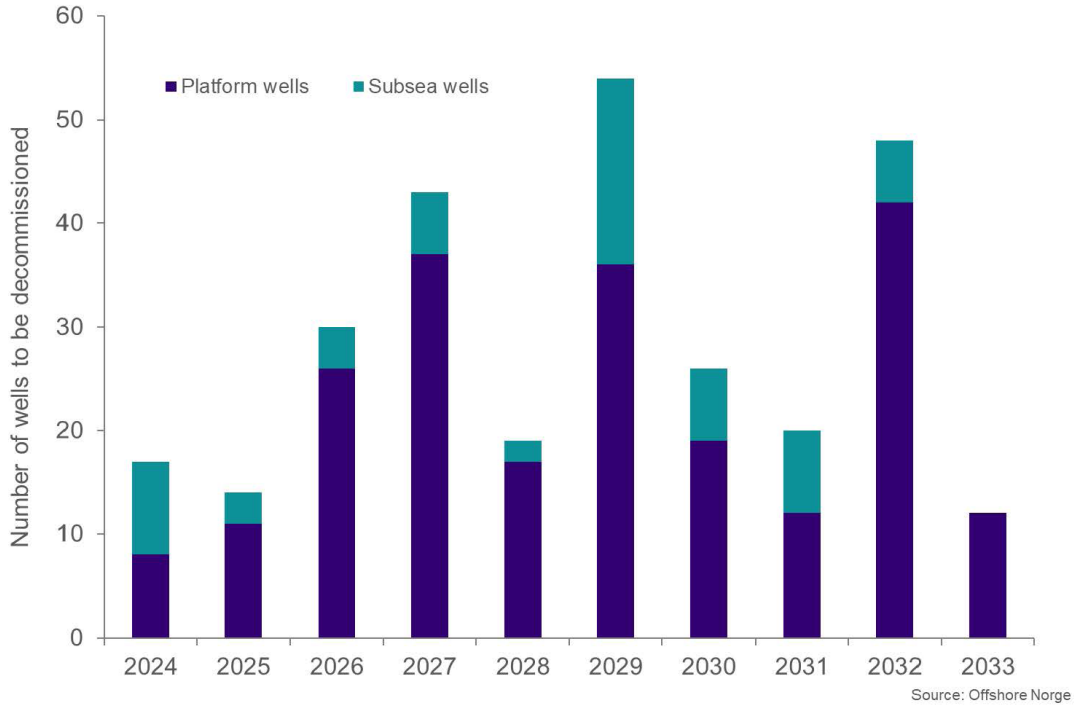
Substructure tonnage to be removed:
100,675

Pipelines to be decommissioned:
818 km

Umbilicals to be decommissioned:
172 km

Mattresses to be decommissioned:
710 tonnes

Figure 18
Norwegian well decommissioning



9. Appendices

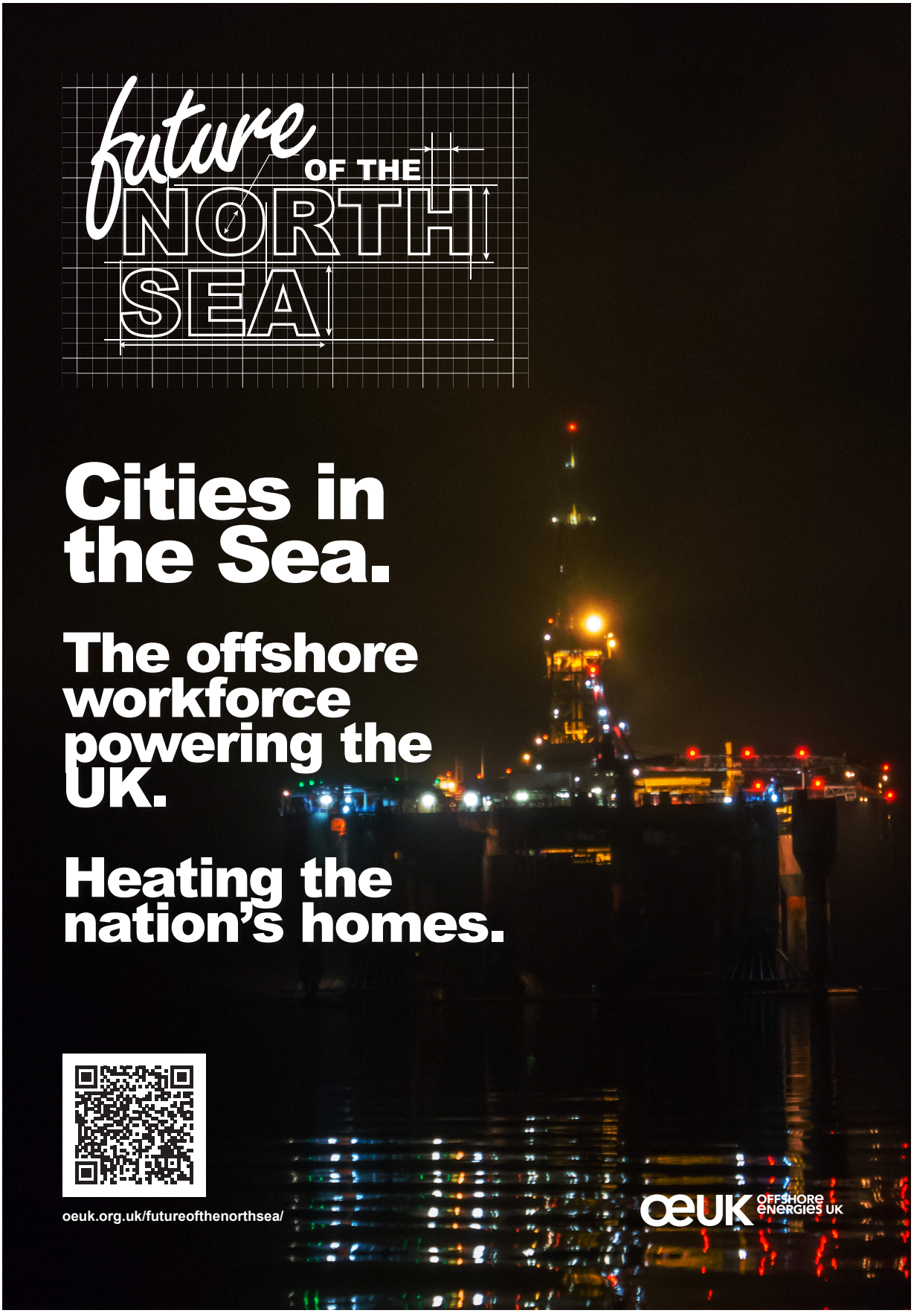
9.1. Glossary

AACE	Association for the Advancement of Cost Engineering
Asset Stewardship Survey	A survey run by the NSTA which creates a single source of robust data. It is used to inform stewardship reviews and provide meaningful insights into current and forecast activity in the UKCS.
CCUS	Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage
CGBS	Concrete gravity-based structure
CNS	Central North Sea
Comparative Assessment	Used to compare options, examine differences and identify the 'most preferred' option in the development of decommissioning programmes for: a) All installations for which derogation is sought under OSPAR Decision 98/3; b) All pipelines being decommissioned under the Petroleum Act 1998; and c) All drill cuttings piles that are not screened out at Stage 1 of OSPAR
CoP	Cessation of production
COP26	The 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference, more commonly referred to as COP26, was the 26th United Nations Climate Change conference, held in Glasgow 2021
Decommissioning Programme	The Petroleum Act 1998 requires owners to set out the measures to decommission disused installations and/or pipelines in a decommissioning programme. A decommissioning programme must identify all the items of equipment, infrastructure and materials that have been installed and describe the decommissioning solution for each.
Derogation	In the context of offshore installations, derogation is related to leaving a structure wholly or partially in place as an exemption to the OSPAR convention which prevents disposal of waste at sea.
DBT	Department of Business and Trade
EBN	Energie Beheer Nederland: state-owned producer and equity holder
E&A	Exploration and appraisal
FPSO	Floating production, storage and offload vessel
HSE	Health & Safety Executive
IS	Irish Sea
Making safe	'Making safe' of facilities includes cleaning, freeing equipment of hydrocarbons, disconnection and physical isolation, and waste management. 'Making safe' of pipelines involves depressurising them and removing any hydrocarbons. Then the pipelines are cleaned and purged, in line with the cleaning programme based on the specific needs of the system.

Mattresses	A structure laid over or under a pipeline to provide protection, stabilisation or structural integrity.
NNS	Northern North Sea
NOGEPA	Netherlands Oil and Gas Exploration and Production Association
NZTC	Net Zero Technology Centre
OGA/NSTA	Oil & Gas Authority (now North Sea Transition Authority)
OPRED	Offshore Petroleum Regulator for Environment and Decommissioning
OSPAR	OSPAR is the mechanism by which 15 governments & the EU co-operate to protect the marine environment of the northeast Atlantic.
Post-CoP OPEX	Operational expenditure after production has ceased.
SNS	Southern North Sea
Topsides	The facilities which sit on top of an installation, typically including drilling, processing and living quarters.
Work Breakdown Structures (WBS)	The WBS shows all elements of a typical decommissioning project and forms the basis for calculating decommissioning expenditure during different stages of the process.
WDON	Well Decommissioning Operators Network
WG4	Work Group 4
WoS	West of Shetland

9.2 Forecast Activity in the UKCS Over the Next Decade in Detail

		Northern North Sea & West of Shetland	Central North Sea	Southern North Sea and Irish Sea	Total UKCS
Number of wells to be decommissioned	Platform wells	346	606	315	**1,224**
	Subsea wells	277	363	34	**674**
	Suspended E&A wells	28	33	24	**85**
	Total	**608**	**1,002**	**373**	**1,983**
Number of topsides to be removed		18	30	79	**127**
Total weight of topside to be removed (tonnes)		366,224	441,105	195,917	**973,246**
Number of substructures to be decommissioned		9	30	75	**114**
Total weight of substructures to be decommissioned (tonnes)		121,646	274,071	106,376	**502,093**
FPSO weight to be removed (tonnes)		98,730	210,949	21,489	**331,168**
Subsea structures to be removed (tonnes)		39,230	49,845	6,275	**95,350**
Number of mattresses for removal		7,239	19,912	3,067	**30,218**
Total spend (£bn)		**6.8**	**14.5**	**4.3**	**25.5**


future OF THE NORTH SEA
Cities in the Sea.
The offshore workforce powering the UK.
Heating the nation's homes.
oeuk.org.uk/futureofthenorthsea/
OEUK OFFSHORE ENERGIES UK

Notes


WELL
DECOMMISSIONING
POST-COP
RUNNING
COSTS
PROJECT
MANAGEMENT
POST
DECOMMISSIONING
MONITORING
SITE
REMEDIATION


& PIPELINE
T ISOLATION
ANING
TOPSIDES
PREPARATION
TOPSIDES
REMOVAL
SUBSTRUCTURE
REMOVAL
TOPSIDES AND
SUB-STRUCTURE
ONSHORE DISPOSAL
SUBSEA
INFRASTRUCTURE

Working together, we are a driving force of the UK's energy security and net zero ambitions. Our innovative companies, people and communities add value to the UK economy.

Join us today and help strengthen the UK offshore energy industry and your business.

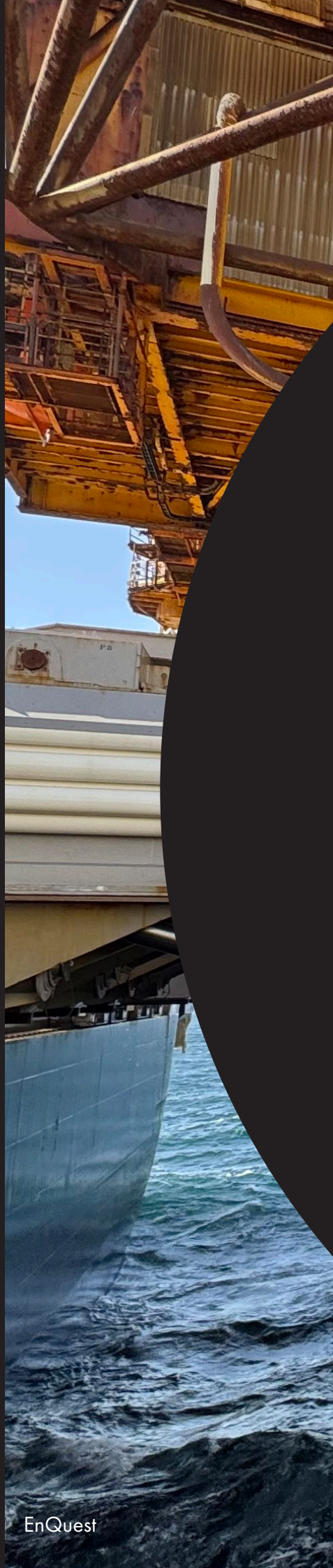
membership@OEUK.org.uk

OEUK.org.uk

info@OEUK.org.uk

@OEUK_

Offshore Energies UK



EnQuest