

Electrical faults close two northwest facilities

Thursday, January 03, 2008

ELECTRICAL problems have forced Woodside Petroleum to shutdown the North West Shelf Venture's Karratha gas plant and Santos to halt output from the Mutineer-Exeter oil fields.

Woodside said it was investigating the cause of the electrical fault, adding that all personnel were safe and accounted for.

The Karratha gas plant produces LNG, condensate, liquefied petroleum gas and pipeline natural gas for the domestic market.

The plant produces about 33,000 tonnes of LNG and 104,000 barrels of condensate each day, according to Woodside's third-quarter production report.

Domestic gas production was expected to resume late Thursday, with liquefied natural gas production to start soon after.

"Woodside does not believe that the production disruption will materially affect its production forecast for the year," it said.

Likewise, Santos reported on Christmas Eve that electrical damage had rendered the sub-sea pumps at its Mutineer-Exeter oil field inoperable, lowering production to a rate of about 4000 to 5000 bopd – about one tenth of its usual output.

Output from the field is expected to restart today, after a shutdown since Saturday.

On a positive note for Woodside, output has resumed at its 50,000 bopd Enfield oil field, while its 70,000 bopd Cossack-Pioneer field was due to resume output late on Wednesday.

The shut-downs follow the arrival of Cyclone Melanie in the northwest region at the end of last year. According to Bureau of Meteorology reports, the storm is losing steam and is heading westward away from the Coral Bay coast.

The cyclone resulted in the suspension of 260,000 barrels of production per day, representing half of Australia's total oil output.

Meanwhile, BHP Billiton has brought its 80,000 bopd Stybarrow oil field back online at reduced rates.

However, production at BHP's 10,600 bopd Griffin oil field remained shut-in as the company waited for calmer weather to bring back the production vessel.

Cyclone Melanie was the first storm of the November-to-April season to form in northwest Australia's 'cyclone alley.'

A second weather system, a tropical low, has developed further off the northwest coast and is causing "rough to very rough seas" with moderate swell, the Bureau of Meteorology said on its website.



The North West Shelf onshore gas plant at Karratha