

Successful unloading of the jack-up rig that will permanently seal the Castor storage wells

Unloaded at the Port of Tarragona, the Noble Resolve jack-up rig is being transported to the Castor storage facility off the coast of Vinaròs. According to the Spanish Council of Ministers' agreement of 31 October 2019, ordering the sealing and permanent abandonment of the wells, Enagás has been commissioned to carry out this work, scheduled to get underway this April

Over 80 people, including crew, tugboats, Port Operations personnel from the Port Authority of Tarragona (APT) and Port Police, among others, assisted in the operation

Noble Corporation's jack-up rig, which arrived on Sunday 30 March, was transported from Denmark to the Port of Tarragona on the specialised heavy lift vessel (HLV) Cosco Xiang Rui Kou. Eighty people took part in the unloading operation, performed in the early hours of the morning, including the team on board the Noble Resolve and the HLV, private tugboats and Port Operations personnel from the APT and Port Police, among others. Having completed the operation, the jack-up rig is now heading south to the Castor storage facility to begin the process of sealing and decommissioning the wells.

The HLV anchored in the Port of Tarragona anchorage area, one nautical mile from the city's coastline. This approach was necessary because the unloading operation for this type of vessel requires sufficient depth for the ship to be partially submerged. This partial immersion, carried out in the early hours of this morning, meant that the jack-up could be unloaded and transported, as it is already taking place, to the Castor storage facility off the coast of Vinaròs.

Preliminary work

Preliminary work to unload the rig got underway on Monday. For Noble Resolve, tasks included verifying its position, disconnecting the cooling and fire-fighting water services, which had been supplied by the HLV vessel on its journey from Denmark to Tarragona. In addition, a visual inspection to check the status of all critical rig connections was carried out and the rig was prepared so that it could be secured to the tugs involved in the operation.

There was a crew of 50 on board the jack-up rig, and eight crew members remained on board during the unloading process. They were responsible for directing operations and for commissioning the rig's critical systems so that it could be put into operation once it was in the water. The rest of the crew joined them once the unloading was complete.

For the semi-submersible HLV Cosco Xiang Rui Kou, the preliminary work focused on removing the moorings and other attachments used to secure the rig to the Heavy Lift Vessel. Half of the straps were removed during the last day of sailing and, once unloaded, 25% of the anchoring points remained attached to make it easier to move the rig, as a precaution against possible adverse weather conditions or other unforeseen circumstances.

Furthermore, the HLV manoeuvred to ensure that the main deck remained above the waterline. As a result, the time taken for the HLV to reach its final unloading depth was reduced.

Unloading the rig

The unloading operation got underway in the early hours of the morning. The first phase involved ballasting the HLV Cosco Xiang Rui Kou to partially submerge it, allowing the rig to remain afloat. The submersion process took around four hours. Following this, the Noble Resolve was leak-tested and, having passed the inspection, the unloading procedure got underway.

A total of four tugs took part in this operation, including three privately-owned vessels (Mukallah, Skandi Laser and Skandi Tender) and one belonging to the Port Authority of Tarragona.

The first step involved two of the tugs positioning themselves at their starting point and beginning to undock the rig from the vessel. The second step was to secure the rig to the two tugs and begin releasing the HLV's winch ropes, which allowed the rig to move into position for unloading.

The third step saw the winch ropes released completely, with the two tugs continuing to move the platform until it was gradually able to float on the water. At this stage, the Noble Resolve was secured to the third and fourth tugs, which would then take control of the rig.

After the unloading operation was complete, the tugs headed south and are now transporting the Noble Resolve jack-up rig to the Castor storage area off the coast of Vinaròs. According to the Spanish Council of Ministers' agreement of 31 October 2019, ordering the sealing and permanent abandonment of the wells, Enagás has been commissioned to carry out this work, scheduled to get underway this April.

Tarragona, 1 April 2025