

Deficiency reigns

Lebanon lacks the data and capacity for oil and gas activity, environmental assessment finds

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We don't want this to happen

Lebanon suffers from “high” deficiencies of social and environmental baseline data as well as a “capacity deficiency within authorities,” according to the long-awaited strategic environmental assessment (SEA) related to potential oil and gas activities, **recently published** by the Lebanese Petroleum Administration.

More than two years after it was **completed** — and despite **promises** that it would be published in May 2013 — the LPA recently made the SEA available on its website. An SEA is a first step for evaluating and monitoring the environmental and social impact of oil and gas exploration and production — should commercially viable quantities of oil or gas be

found. RPS Energy, part of UK consultancy RPS Group and author of the eight volume document, notes that more in depth environmental and social impact assessments should be completed by international oil and gas companies after exploration and production sharing contracts are signed but before any work begins.

The SEA notes that a lack of data covering Lebanon's offshore waters is "alarming in the context of a developing oil and gas industry. Surveys of the bio-physical and socio-economic baseline conditions that record the conditions existing prior to any influence from the oil and gas industry are essential."

Further, the SEA recommends that prior to any oil and gas activity, "legal protection is afforded" to 18 maritime protection areas along Lebanon's coast that have been "identified and well-researched" by Lebanese academics.

As for potential oil spills in Lebanon's coastal waters, the SEA provides several different models of what spills may look like, and suggests "the need for a National Contingency Plan covering oil spills in Lebanese waters." An entire volume of the SEA is devoted to creating such a contingency plan, in part because "it can be unclear which ministerial body is responsible and accountable for which regulator sector, this is especially so in land related issues." It is not clear whether the Lebanese government has followed up on these recommendations.

Similarly, RPS Energy reports that writing the document "was only partially successful" as one of the SEA's primary purposes is to review the primary strategy for developing an oil and gas sector in Lebanon "in relation to plans and programmes from other government departments and ministries." The company writes in the SEA's introduction "[a]lthough plans and programmes were requested from the ministries consulted these were either not in a document format or unavailable. There was reluctance in many departments to discuss future plans as a culture of secrecy still exists."

The SEA is [available for download here](#), and Executive will be offering additional coverage of the document and its significance in the coming weeks.



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