

# THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

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## Lebanon's offshore gas likely exceeds Cyprus, Syria

By Osama Habib

BEIRUT: Lebanon may have more offshore natural gas deposits than Cyprus and Syria, based on a recent 3-D seismic survey, the CEO of Norway-based Spectrum Company said Thursday.

"My humble opinion based on the data that I have is that there is greater potential [for natural gas] offshore Lebanon than offshore Cyprus and offshore Syria," David Rowlands told The Daily Star over the telephone.

He added that the Levantine basin offshore Lebanon was more perceptive than offshore Cyprus and Syria.

These results, Rowlands stressed, were based on data gathered from Lebanon, Cyprus and Syria by Spectrum and its partner Dolphin Geophysical, which is surveying the Lebanese coast with its high-capacity seismic vessel, M/V Polar Duke.

"We compared the data of offshore Lebanon with the data of offshore Cyprus and Syria."

But Rowlands declined to compare the potential size of Lebanon's natural gas to Israel.

M/V Polar Duke has been surveying the Lebanese coast since last Sunday and the initial results, according to officials in the company, were more than encouraging.

"As of this morning, the Polar Duke has acquired 650 square kilometers off the Lebanese coast. The productivity of the vessel is excellent and much better than average," Rowlands explained.

He added that normally a 3-D vessel acquired about 50 km each day but Polar Duke was averaging 85 km each day off the Lebanese coast.

"We have achieved this result because the sea is very calm so the productivity is excellent," the CEO said.

Rowlands added that processing this data would not be completed until January 2013.

"The processing of the data will be then done onshore. The early results have shown us structure which has never been seen before. The geological structures are favorable for accumulation of gas and this has never been seen before at this early stage," Rowlands said.

He added that the area which the vessel was surveying was 3,000 square km in the southwest offshore Lebanon.

Rowlands stressed that the prospects of finding oil off the Lebanese coast were good but noted

that gas was still more favorable.

He added that many of the energy companies that were waiting for the bidding for gas to start were very frustrated by the government's inability to name the six members for the Petroleum Committee which would oversee the issuance of the licenses.

"It is vitally important that the Lebanese government announce the petroleum administration so it can do its work and announce the opening of the first license. I talked to foreign oil companies and I can tell you that they are frustrated by the delay in appointing members of the administration."

The Cabinet has failed to name the six members amid signs of deep differences between some ministers over who should be in the administration.

Energy and Water Minister Gebran Bassil said earlier that 26 foreign companies have expressed interest in exploring gas and oil off the Lebanese coast.

"Some of the companies interested in exploring gas in Lebanon are following the politics in the country. Frustration is an understatement because the oil companies are very disappointed," Rowlands said.

He added that the companies would be invited to bid for what is termed as "acreage" offshore Lebanon.

"Offshore Lebanon is a 22,000-square-km zone and the bidding companies will bid for blocs in this zone. The foreign oil companies will make the investment and drill the well. The Lebanese government will not pay anything because the foreign firms will make this investment," Rowlands said.

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