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Searcher is back with a second attempt at seismic survey off the West Coast

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West Coast communities and activists opposed a previous seismic survey off the West Coast.

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Geoscience data company Searcher has applied for a new permit to conduct a seismic survey off the West Coast.

A high court had blocked Searcher's previously planned survey off the West Coast due to an inadequate public consultation process.

This time, Searcher is targeting a survey area further from the coast.

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Searcher has applied for a permit to conduct a seismic survey off the West Coast of South Africa after its previous attempt was blocked by a court.

The geoscience data company, based in the UK, was **previously blocked by the Western Cape High Court** from conducting a multi-client 2D and 3D seismic survey programme off the West Coast. The court found that the company excluded small-scale fishers from the consultation process. On this basis, the applicants in the matter had challenged Searcher's authorisation for the project.

At the time of the court's ruling, Searcher's vice

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future surveys in South Africa.

However, Searcher has not sworn off business in the country just yet. The company on 13 July **issued a notice** indicating that it has applied for a new reconnaissance permit. The notice was published in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa and invited interested and affected parties to participate in the environmental authorisation application process.

Environmental advisory firm – Environmental Impact Management Services (EIMS) has been appointed as the environmental assessment practitioner and will assist Searcher in its application for environmental authorisation. The authorisation process includes public consultation.

The survey will be conducted in an area 256km offshore from St Helena Bay and will stretch to 220km offshore from Hondeklip Bay. "The survey area at the closest point is approximately 218km offshore of the Western and Northern Cape coast." It covers the "Northern Cape Ultra Deep Licence Area" and various petroleum licence blocks.

Notably, the survey area is further from the coast than a previous intended survey – **which was to be 20km off the coast**. Hopping said that Searcher has selected a smaller survey area - within a region it believes to have the "highest potential for success" in the search for hydrocarbons that South Africa could use for energy.

"The area that we are requesting permission to survey is approximately 100km x 100km which equates to just 1% of the total South African offshore exclusive economic zone," Hopping said in an emailed response to questions.

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regulators are comfortable that Searcher's operations will have "very low" environmental impact. "The regulators need to be comfortable that we have consulted with all stakeholders and taken their concerns, if any, into consideration," Hopping added.

The Petroleum Agency of South Africa and EIMS have been approached for comment.

**This article was updated at 10:00 on Friday 15 July 2022, with comment from Searcher.*

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