

Subsea Choke Insert Locking Apparatus

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5 CROSS-REFERENCES TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] Not Applicable.

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

[0002] Not Applicable.

10 BACKGROUND

[0003] In accordance with certain embodiments, the present invention relates to method and apparatus for lockable inserts for oilfield equipment and, more particularly, to equipment used subsea for choke applications among others.

15 [0004] Offshore oilfield operation frequently requires making connections subsea, typically using Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs) or divers. Typically a connection between a male and female component completes the subsea connection. The connection can be a pipe coupling or the insertion of a valve interior component into a housing that is located subsea. Once the connection is brought together it is locked into that position, thus securing the connection.

20 [0005] The subsea environment is hostile, and issues of attack on the components over a period of time are a concern in any such connection. Another general concern is debris that can get into the area where the locking is to take place. Over time some of these effects can operate in tandem to preclude a secure locking of the connection or to prevent unlocking when it is time to undo the connection. Exposure of the
25 actuation assembly to seawater can also undermine its effective operation. Yet another issue affecting such connections is the long term effect of transmitted vibration to the connection, which can unintentionally move the actuation mechanism that locks the locking dogs into a surrounding recess or groove and potentially cause an inadvertent separation of the connected components.

[0006] USP 6,237,964 is illustrative of the issues that are confronted in such subsea connections. With reference to the numerical reference numbers presented in this patent, Ostergaard shows a female component 14 that accepts a valve insert 4 and 6. To connect these components, an actuating sleeve 20 is movable axially as the ring gear 28 that has threads 26 engages threads 24 on sleeve 20 to urge the sleeve down
5 behind dogs 45. The downward movement of the sleeve places dogs 45 into a locked position where surfaces 41 and 44 engage, thus locking the connection. In essence, the lower end of sleeve 20 cams the dogs 45 into locking engagement with the opposing recess in the female component 14. A seal 18 is at the same time actuated
10 to hold the pressure within the connection when the two components are locked together.

[0007] A few features of this design are worth noting. The dogs 45 and their surrounding groove are exposed to seawater that enters between housing 11 and top face 22. The operating mechanism that moves the sleeve 20 axially up or down is
15 also exposed to seawater where the threads for driving engage one another. Additionally, there is no backup device to unlock the connection if the sleeve 20 fails to come up with the existing drive system. Finally, there is no device in this assembly to compensate for transmitted vibration which could result in inadvertent axial motion of sleeve 20 as vibration induces rotation back to input shaft 34. In essence,
20 the connection can inadvertently release because of vibration induced axial movement of the sleeve 20 that induce rotation at the threaded connection and back to input shaft 34.

[0008] A similar design is offered by Liaaen and shown in Figure 1. It features a female component or valve body 10 that accepts a male component or insert 12.
25 When the two components are pushed together, a seal 14 retains pressure within the body 10. In the split view of Figure 1 it can be seen that the insert 12 is secured to the body 10 by the urging of the dogs 18 into an opposing recess or slot 16. An axially movable sleeve 20 then gets behind dogs 18 to prevent retraction of the dogs from recess 16. An input shaft 22 rotates a mating thread 24 with the result being that the
30 sleeve 20 can be moved axially in opposed directions. While a housing 26 keeps the driving components for the insert 12 isolated from seawater, it is clear that the rest of

the components for locking the connection are exposed to seawater via fluid pathways represented by arrow system 30. Seawater can have negative impacts on a threaded connection 24 by precluding makeup or release with no backup system available to raise sleeve 20 if rotation of shaft 22 does not get the job done, for instance. The dogs 18 are in seawater, and there is no anchoring mechanism to hold the position of sleeve 20 against vibratory forces.

[0009] Those skilled in the art will appreciate the manner in which such problems are addressed from the description of the preferred embodiment, the drawings and from the full scope of the invention in the appended claims.

10 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] In accordance with certain embodiments, the present invention provides a connection for subsea use that employs locking dogs that are isolated from seawater and includes a backup system for operating the sleeve that positions the dogs. The normal actuation system for the sleeve is also isolated from seawater exposure. The set position of the sleeve is positively retained against the prospect of axial movement that could be triggered by transmitted vibration into the connection.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] These and other features, aspects, and advantages of the present invention will become better understood when the following detailed description is read with reference to the accompanying drawings in which like characters represent like parts throughout the drawings, wherein:

[0012] Figure 1 is a prior art design shown in section;

[0013] Figure 2 is a section view showing various aspects of the present invention in accordance with certain exemplary embodiments; and

[0014] Figure 3 is a different section than Figure 2 showing the position lock feature when the insert is installed in the body, in accordance with certain exemplary embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0015] Figure 2 illustrates an exemplary choke 31 where the body 32 has an inlet 34 and an outlet 36. This exemplary choke 31 includes an insert assembly 38 that features an exterior stationary cage 40 and a movable plug 42 that is operated within
5 so that ports 44 and 46 can be brought into or out of alignment. Body 32 has a top flange 48 secured to it through bolt holes 50 with fasteners (not shown). Seal 52 seals between the body 32 and the flange 48. Flange 48 has a recess or circular groove or grooves or some other surface irregularity 54 that preferably has a conforming shape to dog or dogs or equivalent locking members 56. Locking members 56 can be short
10 segments that are individually actuated as well as a split ring whose diameter grows as the split is opened when it is urged out radially. A sliding sleeve 58 can be forced behind dogs 56 to force them into conforming grooves 54 after the insert assembly 38 is fully advanced into the body 32. The insert assembly 38 has a lower support plate 60 that is supported by hub 62. A seal 64 seals out sea water from below dogs
15 56 in its position between plate 60 and flange 48. Housing 66 in conjunction with plate 60 define an opening through which the dogs 56 can be cammed radially for a lock into recess 54 of flange 48. Housing 66 has a seal 68 that is above dogs 56 to keep seawater away from dogs 56 from above by sealing against flange 48.

[0016] Sliding sleeve 58 has inner seal 70 and outer seal 72 to define cavity 74 that
20 is connected to a hydraulic pressure source 76 through lines 78. By providing pressurized hydraulic fluid into cavity 74, the increase in pressure raises sleeve 58 as a backup way to retract the dogs 56 for release of the insert assembly 38 from the body 32. The normal way that the dogs 56 are cammed radially outward is by applying axial force on rod 80 in a direction toward body 32. Rod 80, and there could
25 be one or more than one, extends through a sealed housing 82 that is filled with a lubricant and is sealed to exclude seawater as rod 80 is moved in opposed directions by an ROV (not shown). Plate 86 moves in tandem with rod 80. Rod 88 is connected to plate 86 at its upper end and sleeve 58 at the lower end. As a result, when the ROV moves rod 80 down, sleeve 58 moves down and dogs 56 get cammed into recess 54.
30 To release the insert assembly 38 from body 32, the rod 80 is raised and the insert assembly 38 will come out in response to an upward pull, since the dogs 56 are now

unsupported after the retraction of sleeve 58. Again, sometimes the sleeve 58 will not budge under a force applied to rod 80. If that happens, there is a backup way to get the sleeve 58 to come up by applying hydraulic pressure to cavity 74. The insert assembly 38 is normally operated using components in housing 82 using an ROV to manipulated shaft 102 in a manner known in the art.

[0017] It can be seen that seals 64 and 68 that surround dogs 56 keep circulating seawater away from the dogs 56, thus keeping debris out and the corrosive effects of such exposure to a minimum. While some small quantity of seawater is present at makeup, the amount is very small and continuous exposure thereafter is no longer an issue. The moving parts that operate the sleeve 58 are disposed within housing 82 that excludes seawater and preferably has lubricating oil within. By placing these components in a lubricating bath, design life can be improved, seawater corrosion can be prevented, algae growth can be limited, and the ingress of debris can be retarded. Additionally, it is only the portion of the rod 80 that extends from housing 82 that sees seawater. A seal, not shown, surrounds rod 80 as it slides through plate 90 of housing 82.

[0018] The position lock feature of sleeve 58 can be better understood by noting the relative positions of upper plate 92 and lower plate 94 in Figure 2, before looking at Figure 3. Figure 3 is a section at a different orientation than the Figure 2 section to show this additional feature. Figure 3 shows a rod 96 that extends through upper plate 92 in a threaded relationship. The rod 96 bears on lower plate 94 when properly rotated by an ROV or otherwise to advance against plate 94. Because of the threaded connection at plate 92 rod 96 is tightly forced against plate 94 thus holding sleeve 58 tightly in the Figure 2 position where it holds dogs 56 locked to recess 54 in flange 48 despite transmitted vibration. While one type of position lock against vibration has been illustrated those skilled in the art will recognize that different locking designs can be used. One distinct advantage of the locking feature is that it too is within the housing 82 and is therefore protected from the adverse effects of prolonged exposure to seawater.

[0019] Those skilled in the art will appreciate that dogs 56 can be held retracted for run in with a band spring or equivalent 100.

[0020] The described design keeps the locking dogs 56 isolated from seawater as well as the entire drive mechanism for locking sleeve 58 except for a portion of rod 80 that extends above plate 90 in housing 82. The locking mechanism described in Figure 3 is also isolated from seawater in housing 82. Additionally, a backup way of retracting the sleeve 58 exists if pulling on rod 80 fails to raise the sleeve 58.

[0021] The above description is illustrative of the exemplary embodiments of the present invention, and many modifications may be made by those skilled in the art without departing from the invention whose scope is to be determined from the literal and equivalent scope of the claims below:

CLAIMS:

1. A subsea connection, comprising:

a female component;

a male component insertable subsea in seawater into said female
5 component;

a lock to selectively secure said components together, said lock
isolated from access to seawater upon joining of said components.

2. The connection of claim 1, further comprising:

10 an actuation device for said lock that is isolated from exposure to
seawater.

3. The connection of claim 1, wherein:

said lock further comprises a backup system to prevent said lock from
15 becoming unlocked once actuated, said backup system is isolated from seawater
exposure.

4. The connection of claim 1, further comprising:

said lock can be defeated in more than one way.

5. The connection of claim 4, wherein:

each way to defeat said lock is isolated from seawater.

6. The connection of claim 5, wherein:

25 said lock comprises at least one radially movable dog that can be
selectively supported in a radially extended position by a sleeve;

said sleeve can be translated mechanically or hydraulically to move
away from said dog.

7. The connection of claim 6, wherein:

said lock further comprises a backup system to prevent said lock from becoming unlocked once actuated, said backup system is isolated from seawater exposure.

5 8. The connection of claim 7, wherein

said backup system comprises an elongated member that can be selectively advanced through a stationary plate to prevent said sleeve from moving with respect to said plate.

10 9. The connection of claim 8, wherein:

said elongated member and said plate are threaded where they connect such that rotation of said rod advances it toward said sleeve to prevent movement of said sleeve away from said dog.

15 10. The connection of claim 2, wherein:

said male component comprises the internals of a subsea choke and a housing isolated from seawater;

said actuation device comprises an operating element as the only component extending from said housing and exposed to seawater and whose manipulation operates said lock.

20 11. The connection of claim 6, wherein:

said dog is mounted to said male component and is positioned between seals when said components are brought together.

25 12. The connection of claim 11, wherein:

said sleeve is mounted within said housing and is isolated from seawater exposure.

30 13. The connection of claim 12, wherein:

a backup system selectively acts on said sleeve to force it to stay behind said dog when said dog is radially extended to lock the components, said

backup system comprises a travel stop for said sleeve within said housing that can be moved into position with an operating member that sealingly extends through said housing.

5 14. The connection of claim 13, wherein:

 said operating member comprises a rod that is threaded through a stationary plate within said housing to selectively bear against an assembly that comprises said sleeve.

10 15. The connection of claim 13, wherein:

 said sleeve is movable via an operating rod that sealingly extends through said housing.

 16. The connection of claim 15, wherein:

15 said sleeve is disposed in a sealed chamber that can exert hydraulic pressure to alternatively move said sleeve away from said dog in a situation where said operating rod fails to move said sleeve away from said dog.

 17. The connection of claim 16, wherein:

20 said male component further comprises a choke valve member operable through said housing through a shaft sealingly extending therethrough.

18. The connection of claim 6, wherein:

 said dog comprises a plurality of discrete dogs.

25 19. The connection of claim 6, wherein:

 said dog comprises a split ring.