commingled mixture is conveyed to a host facility. There, the sand is separated from the commingled mixture and disposed of.

C.H. Rawlins, Kvaerner Process Systems; S.E. Staten, Chevron USA Production Company; I.I. Wang, Kvaerner Process Systems: "Design and Installation of a Sand Separation and Handling System for a Gulf of Mexico Oil Production Facility", Society of Petroleum Engineers, and GB 2 342 057 A are also concerned with the separation of sand from a well stream.

An aim with the present invention is to provide a subsea sand handling system which alleviates some of the problems associated with the known systems. This is achieved with a system and method as defined in the attached claims.

The invention regards a subsea sand handling system for limiting abrasion of specific subsea equipment. The handling system comprises an inlet connectable to a sand separation system upstream of the specific equipment and an outlet connectable to a pipeline downstream of the specific equipment. There are several known systems for separating sand out of a wellstream. The present invention will work well with different kinds of sand separation systems. The specific equipment would normally be rotating equipment such as a pump, but could also be other kinds of subsea equipment which should be prevented from exposure to sand and the associated abrasion of sand in a wellstream.

According to the invention the system comprises at least two collection vessels and means for flushing the sand out of at least one of the collection vessels, and the vessels and the means for flushing the sand out of said vessels are configured such that sand is flushed from one vessel while sand at the same time is collected in the other vessel.

may still have one flushing system, but this flushing system may be connected to both vessels.

According to one embodiment the connection between the inlet and the vessels may comprise one three-way valve, connecting both vessels to the inlet of the system and regulating the flow of fluid from a de-sanding unit towards the vessels. This gives the possibility to regulate which of the vessels that collects sand, and the collection of sand is done without interruptions.

According to an aspect the flushing system may comprise connections to both vessels and valves for regulating the flushing of the separate vessels. There may with such a system be one flushing system operating both vessels. According to another aspect the vessels may be arranged to be rotatable about an axis, for thereby in one position be in connection with the de-sanding unit and in a second position be in connection with the flushing means. The vessels may by the rotation switch places and thereby with its position either be connected to the de-sanding unit or be connected to the flushing system. Even with such a system the sand collection may be done substantially without interruptions.

According to another aspect the system may comprise means for leading fluid from upstream and or downstream of the rotating equipment into the flushing system, to flush the vessels. The flushing system may comprise an ejector arranged with an active driving fluid through the ejector, taken downstream of the pump if the specific equipment is a pump. The second fluid in the flushing system with an ejector may for instance be taken downstream or upstream of the pump. This fluid is driven through the vessel to be flushed by the high pressure fluid in the ejector, creating a suction. Thereby the sand is driven out of the vessels and into the wellstream, downstream with the high pressure active driving fluid in the ejector system. The means for flushing sand from the tank does not form part of the invention and a skilled person would understand that there are many ways of achieving this.

According to the invention there is also provided a method for limiting abrasion of subsea rotating equipment. The method comprises separating at least a part of the sand in a wellstream from the wellstream, allowing the rest of the wellstream to continue towards the rotating equipment, collecting the separated sand in one out of two collection units / vessels in a sand collecting system, flushing sand from one vessel while sand is collected in the other vessel at the same time, into the wellstream downstream of the rotating equipment.

The invention shall now be explained with non-limiting embodiments with reference to the attached drawing where;