

Arrangement for sand collection

The present invention regards a sand handling system and a method for handling sand.

5 Sand through rotating equipment should generally be avoided as it reduces the performance of the equipment and will in many cases cause early failure. This issue can be solved by selecting more robust materials for the pump internals but it only prolongs the pump runlife for a limited period of time. Hence, if sand can be prevented from entering the pump it will have a significant impact on pump runlife.

10 In onshore applications one may separate the sand out from a production stream and relatively easy handle the sand. In subsea applications the handling of sand separated out from a well stream is not easy. One may not discharge the sand to the surroundings as this would lead to pollutions which should be avoided. The sand must be handled. There are several earlier proposals for the removal of sand in a well stream. In one proposal the sand is accumulated in the separation tank and
15 periodically flushed from the tank downstream of the pump. Such a solution would affect the well stream in periods giving periods with large quantities of sand and other periods with small quantities of sand, which is not desirable. In another proposal a retrievable sand tank is used. This is designed to be retrieved to the surface when full. Retrieving the sand tank, however, is becoming more difficult as
20 the water depths are increasing.

WO 2004/003335 A1 discloses an underwater system having a hydro-cyclone for separating sand from seawater, and a pump downstream from the hydro-cyclone for drawing seawater upstream of the hydro-cyclone into the hydro-cyclone. The sand
25 separated from the seawater is collected in a sand storage device below the hydro-cyclone. The pump pumps the seawater from which the sand has been removed into a water injection well and a portion of the seawater is diverted into a sand extraction device beneath the sand storage device to flush away the sand collected therein.

30 WO 03/041838 A1 is concerned with a method and apparatus for collecting and then disposing sand contained in production fluid where production mixture is directed through a sand removal unit is a retrievable module installed in a modular seabed processing system, and the unit collects sand from the mixture. The
35 production fluid mixture then enters a fluid separation chamber in the module where it is separated into a gas and a mixture of oil and water. Seawater is drawn in from outside the module and is pumped into the sand removal unit to flush the collected sand. The mixed flushed sand and seawater is commingled with the mixture of oil and water downstream of the fluid separation chamber and the

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

5 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.

10 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
15 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
20 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
25 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.

With a system according to the invention sand is substantially continuously handled by the sand handling system as it may be collected and flushed at the same time, and these two activities may be done substantially continuously. There is also with such a system the possibility to have the flushing at intervals while at the same time
5 collecting sand substantially continuously, in contradiction to known systems where the collection will have to be stopped while the flushing is performed or the collection unit is retrieved to the surface and replaced with another collection unit.

A system according to the invention would provide a continuous by-pass of sand,
10 which will be preferred as this will give a more compact system. Another benefit is that online monitoring of sand production will be possible with such a system.

According to one aspect of the invention the system may comprise two collection vessels configured such that sand is collected in a first vessel, with connection means from the first vessel to a second collection vessel, for emptying of the sand
15 from the first vessel to the second vessel, and the flushing means are being arranged in connection with the second vessel. In one embodiment the first vessel may be arranged relatively above the second vessel, such that sand may be transferred from the first vessel to the second vessel with the aid of gravity through the connection means. The configuration will then give that sand due to gravity will flow through
20 the connection means down to the second vessel. There may in the connection means be a valve regulating the flow of sand between the two vessels. In another embodiment the connection means from the first to the second vessel may comprise a rotating ball valve comprising chambers for collected sand to be emptied from the first vessel to the second vessel. By rotating the ball valve an amount of sand is
25 moved from one vessel to a second vessel, where it may be flushed from the system. In a third embodiment the first vessel may be arranged above the second vessel with a rotating ball valve comprising chambers in the connection between the two vessels. By rotating the ball valve, sand is moved from the first vessel to the second vessel and gravity will aid in removing sand from the chamber of the ball valve into
30 the second vessel. The gravity will also aid in filling up the chamber of the ball valve present in the first vessel. The chambers of the ball valve may in one embodiment form a substantial part of the vessels, as for instance up to half of the vessels volume or more than half of the vessels volume or possible the full volume of the vessels.

35 According to another aspect the system may comprise two collection vessels, where the vessels and a connection between the vessels and the inlet of the system are so configured that sand alternating is collected in the first and the second vessels and the flushing means are so configured that sand is flushed from the vessels when it is
40 not collecting sand. Sand is with this system also substantially continuously collected as with the system according to the first aspect. With such a system one

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

5 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.

10 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
15 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.

20 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
25 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
30 invention and a skilled person would understand that there are many ways of achieving this.

35 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.

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

Fig. 1 shows a first embodiment of a system according to the invention

Fig. 2 shows a second embodiment, and

Fig. 3 shows a third embodiment.

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In fig. 1 there is shown a pipeline 1 leading fluid from a well, into a de-sander unit 2. Out of the de-sander unit 2 a de-sanded fluid is guided through pipeline 3 and a restriction 4 in this pipeline 3 to a pump 5. Pressure is added to the fluid by the pump 5 exiting through pipeline 6 also comprising a restriction 7. The sand separated out from the well fluid in the de-sander 2 is guided through a second outlet from the de-sander 2 to a pipeline, forming the inlet 10 of the present invention. The pipeline 10 leads to a first vessel 11. Sand is collected from the de-sander unit 2 substantially without interruptions giving that the flow from the well is also without interruptions. The first vessel 11 is connected to a second vessel 14 through a connection 12. In this connection 12 there is arranged a valve 13. The first vessel 11 is in this embodiment arranged relatively vertically above the second vessel 14 giving that when valve 13 is opened, the sand will due to gravity forces flow from the first vessel 11 to the second vessel 14. There is in addition a fluid line 15 leading from an upper part of the first vessel 11 to the fluid line 3 downstream of the first restriction 4 but upstream of the pump 5, for fluid separated from the sand in the first vessel 11. The second vessel 14 then has a sand inlet formed by the connection 12 and a sand outlet 16 leading to an ejector 19. In addition there is a second inlet connected to a pipeline 17, leading a fluid from the high pressure side of the pump into the second vessel 14 and also into the ejector 17. The high pressure fluid lead through pipeline 17 into the ejector will act as the active driving fluid in the ejector and create a suction pressure thereby drawing out fluid with sand from the second vessel 14 through sand outlet 16. From the ejector 17 the fluid containing the sand is guided through pipeline 18 to an inlet in the pipeline 6 leading from the pump, where the inlet is arranged downstream of the second restriction 7 arranged in the pipeline 6 downstream of the pump 5. This forms the flushing system of the first embodiment. There are also arranged suitable sensors in the system for operation of the different elements.

In fig. 2 there is shown a second embodiment of the invention. Similar elements to the first embodiment are given the same reference numerals, and it is referred to the explanation above. In this embodiment there is shown an actuator 20 for operation of moving sand through the connection 12 between the first and second vessel 11, 14. In this embodiment there is shown a ball valve 13, with a first chamber 13a and a second chamber 13b. When the actuator 20 turns the ball valve 13 the chamber 13a is moved from the first vessel 11 into the second vessel 14 and there emptied of sand and chamber 13b is moved from the second vessel 14 to the first vessel 1 to collect sand. Sand is thereby moved between the vessels. Sand is in this

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embodiment emptied from the second vessel 14 with fluid through a fluid line 21, leading from the pipeline 6 downstream of the pump 5 but upstream the restriction 7 and to the second vessel 14, and guided out of the second vessel through a sand outlet line 22, which lead to the pipeline 6 downstream of the second restriction 7.

5 This forming the flushing system of the second embodiment.

In fig. 3 there is shown a third embodiment of the invention. Similar elements are given same reference number as above, and it is referred to the explanation given. In this embodiment the pipeline 10 leading from the sand outlet of the de-sander 2, comprises a three-way valve 10a and a pipeline connection 10' leading to the first vessel 11, and a second pipeline connection 10'' leading to the second vessel 14. By regulating the valve 10a, sand is collected substantially continuously and guided into the first or the second vessel, 11,14. Each of the vessels 11, 14 are connected to a flushing system with a pipeline 17 connected to the pipeline 6 downstream of the pump 5 but upstream of the second restriction 7. The pipeline 17 lead to an ejector 19 and also to a three-way valve 17a, regulating the flow of fluid to either the first vessel 11, through a fluid connection 17' or the second vessel 14 through a second fluid connection 17''. Both vessels 11,14 comprises an outlet, connected through fluid connections 16',16'' and a three-way valve 16a to a pipeline 16 leading to the ejector 19. The outlet of the ejector is guided through pipeline 18 into the pipeline 6 downstream of the second restriction 7. This forms the flushing system of the third embodiment. Both vessels 11,14 also has a fluid connection 15, through a three-way valve 15a between the upper part of the vessels and the pipeline 3, downstream of the restriction 4 but upstream of the pump 5. There are also arranged suitable sensors in the system.

The invention has now been explained with reference to three different embodiments. A skilled person would understand that there may be made alterations and modifications to these embodiments that are within the scope of the invention as defined in the attached claims. It is possible to combine features from the different embodiments, as for instance, a flushing system as described in relation to the first embodiment may be used with the second embodiment and the flushing system in the second embodiment may be used in the first and the third embodiment. One may omit the fluid connection between the upper part of the vessels and the pipeline upstream of the pump. The de-sander may be any kind of de-sander or even a separator separating the well fluid into oil, water, gas and sand or combinations of these different elements. The fluid used in the flushing system may be any of the three fluids separated in the separator, or a combination.

CLAIMS

1. Subsea sand handling system for limiting abrasion of specific subsea equipment (5), comprising an inlet (10) connectable to a sand separation system (2) upstream of the specific equipment (5) and an outlet (18,22) connectable to a pipeline (6) downstream of the specific equipment (5), characterized in that the subsea sand handling system comprises at least two collection vessels (11,14) and means for flushing (16,17,19, 21) the sand out of at least one of the collection vessels (11,14), and the vessels (11,14) and the means for flushing (16,17,19,21) the sand out of said vessels (11,14) are configured such that sand is flushed from one vessel (11,14) while sand at the same time is collected in the other vessel (14,11).
2. Subsea sand handling system according to claim 1, characterized in that it comprises two collection vessels (11,14) configured such that sand is collected in a first vessel (11), with connection means (12) from the first vessel (11) to a second collection vessel (14), for emptying of the sand from the first vessel (11) to the second vessel (14), and the flushing means (16,17,19, 21) are being arranged in connection with the second vessel (14).
3. Subsea sand handling system according to claim 2, characterized in that the first vessel (11) is arranged relatively above the second vessel (14), such that sand may be transferred from the first vessel (11) to the second vessel (14) with the aid of gravity through the connection means (12).
4. Subsea sand handling system according to claim 3, characterized in that the connection means (12) from the first to the second vessel comprises a rotating ball valve (13) comprising chambers (13a,13b) for collected sand to be emptied from the first vessel (11) to the second vessel (14).
5. Subsea sand handling system according to claim 1, characterized in that it comprises two collection vessels (11,14), where the vessels (11,14) and a connection between the vessels (11,14) and the inlet (10) of the system are so configured that sand alternating is collected in the first and the second vessels (11,14) and the flushing means are so configured that sand is flushed from the vessels (11,14) when it is not collecting sand.
6. Subsea sand handling system according to claim 5, characterized in that the connection between the inlet (10) and the vessels (11,14) comprises one three-way valve (10a), connecting both vessels to the inlet (10) of the system and regulating the flow of fluid from a de-sanding unit (2) towards the vessels (11,14).

7. Subsea sand handling system according to claim 5, characterized in that the flushing means (16,17,19) comprises connections (16',16'',17',17'') to both vessels (11,14) and valves (16a,17a) for regulating the flushing of the separate vessels (11,14).

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8. Subsea sand handling system according to claim 5, characterized in that at least a part of the vessels (11,14) are arranged rotatable about an axis, for thereby in one position be in connection with the de-sanding unit (2) and in a second position be in connection with the flushing means (16,17,19).

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9. Subsea sand handling system according to one of the previous claims, characterized in that it comprises means (15,17,21) for leading fluid from upstream or downstream of the rotating equipment into the flushing means to flush the vessels (11, 14).

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10. Method for limiting abrasion of a subsea rotating equipment, comprising the steps of separating at least a part of the sand in a wellstream from the wellstream, allowing the rest of the well stream to continue towards the rotating equipment, collecting the separated sand in one out of two collection vessels (11,14) in a sand collecting system, flushing sand from one vessel while at the same time collecting sand in the other vessel, into the wellstream downstream of the rotating equipment.

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