

Separation device for separating a fluid

This invention relates to a separation device suitable for separating a fluid, said fluid comprising multiple components, into at least two components and to a method of separating said fluid into at least two components.

The separation of a fluid mixture into component parts is an important industrial process in many applications, for example in purification and extraction processes. In the upstream oil and gas market for example, the multiple fluids produced from the well are required to be stabilised (primarily via pressure let-down), with the separated gas and liquid streams each being treated to meet export specifications. In the case of the liquid stream, impurities, such as salts, sand and water, as well as any gas in solution must be removed from the crude oil. These impurities can reduce the value of the crude oil and have a detrimental effect (such as corrosion and erosion) on downstream equipment. Similarly for the associated water stream, oil and gas in the water needs to be removed, and sometimes also any particulates such as sand, to meet the specified limits required for the selected disposal method. It is therefore of great importance to remove contaminants from the extracted fluid mixture.

The separation of a static fluid mixture will occur naturally via the force of gravity. The natural driving force of liquid droplets, solid particles or gas bubbles rising or falling through a main liquid or gas phase is defined by Stokes' Law (equation 1).

$$V_s = \frac{2(\rho_p - \rho_f)}{9\mu} g R^2 \quad (1)$$

In this equation V_s is the settling velocity of the particle, droplet or bubble (m s^{-1}); ρ_p is the mass density of the particle, droplet or bubble (kg m^{-3}); ρ_f is the mass density of the fluid (kg m^{-3}); g is the gravitational acceleration (m s^{-2}); R is the particle, droplet or bubble radius (m); and μ is the dynamic viscosity of the fluid ($\text{kg m}^{-1} \text{s}^{-1}$). Equation 1 indicates that the settling velocity is directly proportional to the gravitational acceleration. Therefore an increase in the gravitational acceleration will increase the settling velocity and proportionally reduce the separation time. Separation techniques, such as hydrocyclones and centrifuges, are based on imparting high gravitational acceleration to fluids to separate a fluid mixture into its individual components.

Hydrocyclones, hereinafter referred to as cyclones, are static separation devices that use centrifugal forces to separate a fluid mixture into at least two components. A typical cyclone is shown in Figure 1, and comprises a cylindrical first chamber (or swirl chamber) **100**, a separation chamber **110**, an inlet nozzle **120**, an underflow outlet nozzle **130** and an overflow outlet nozzle **140**. The inlet nozzle **120** is typically tangential to the cylindrical first chamber (or swirl chamber) **100**. For optimum performance the separation chamber **110** is typically tapered or conical. The overflow outlet nozzle, usually near the cyclone inlet, may also comprise a vortex finder **150**. The fluid mixture enters the cylindrical first chamber (or swirl chamber) under pressure via the tangential inlet nozzle. The swirl chamber helps to induce a rotational spin on the fluid mixture prior to the fluid mixture entering the separation chamber. The rotational spin at the inlet causes the fluid flow profile to form a free vortex in the separation

chamber, where centrifugal forces act to separate the fluid into components of different densities. The centrifugal forces cause denser particles or phases to concentrate towards the walls of the conical separation chamber and the less dense particles or phases to accumulate towards the rotational axis of the vortex. Typically the denser components flow to the bottom of the conical separation chamber, where they can be removed via the underflow outlet nozzle 130. The less dense phases flow to the top of the conical separation chamber where they can be extracted via the vortex finder / overflow outlet nozzle.

Liquid/liquid cyclones may, for example, be used to separate oil droplets from water, however droplet removal efficiency rapidly declines for oil droplets with a diameter less than around 20 μm . In liquid / liquid cyclones, the lighter liquid phase together with free gas, pass via the vortex finder to the overflow outlet. The heavier liquid phase is removed via the underflow outlet. In liquid/solid and gas/solid cyclones, the bulk component, that is the liquid and gas phase respectively, pass via a vortex finder to the overflow outlet. The denser solid components are removed via the underflow outlet. In both liquid/liquid and liquid/solid cyclones, the tapered walls of the cyclone help to maintain the acceleration forces along the length of the cyclone. However, this results in a larger pressure drop between the inlet and outlet nozzles. This pressure drop can lead to system design problems, for example, if insufficient system pressure is available an upstream pump set may be required increasing the size and cost of the equipment required.

In the upstream oil and gas market, fluids produced from a well, typically arriving at high pressure, are a combination of oil, gas, water and solid particles.

Most commonly oil droplets are removed from the oilfield produced water using liquid/liquid cyclones, and solid particles are removed using liquid/solid cyclones. The liquid/liquid cyclones (de-oiling package) and liquid/solid cyclones (de-sanding package) are provided as separate and discrete pieces of equipment. In some instances, particularly offshore, weight and space limitations can inhibit the use of two separate de-oiling and de-sanding packages. Furthermore, inadequate upstream system pressure can limit the cyclones operating at their optimum separation efficiency.

Centrifuges provide an alternative centrifugal method for separating a fluid mixture into its component parts whereby the separation is achieved by rotation of the separator wall. The centrifugal force created forces the denser components to accumulate towards the walls of the separation chamber and the less dense components to concentrate towards the axis of rotation. The power for rotating the chamber is provided via a shaft driven by a motor. The external power supply and motor required to achieve suitable centrifugal forces can greatly increase the size and cost of manufacture and operation of the centrifuge. By virtue of their relative mechanical design complexity, and the need for a motor drive, with associated seals, bearings, lubrication and cooling circuits, centrifuges are significantly more expensive, heavier and take up more space than a cyclone designed for the same capacity. Centrifuges typically establish a bulk rotary flow of the fluid mixture normally without the free vortex that is established in a cyclone. This can result in lower centrifugal forces and reduced separation efficiency in the vicinity of the axis compared to a cyclone for the same throughput.

Centrifuges can be designed to provide higher gravitational acceleration forces compared with cyclones and therefore theoretically achieve higher separation efficiencies, for example, in the separation of water droplets from crude oil, centrifuges may remove water droplets with a diameter in the range of 2 μm and above. Centrifuges have been used on difficult separation duties on oil production applications, such as on heavy oil fields where the density of the oil is close to the density of the water and is beyond the separation capabilities of a hydrocyclone. However, such centrifuge designs are often limited to relatively low throughput operation and to relatively low operating pressures – typically at or near atmospheric pressure. Centrifuges also commonly require dedicated inlet feed pumps, which further increases the size, manufacturing costs, operating costs and power consumption of the machinery.

Thus, known devices and methods for separating a fluid mixture into component parts have a number of limitations associated therewith, and aspects of the present invention, in at least some of its embodiments, seek to address at least some of the above described problems and wants.

According to the first aspect of the invention there is provided a separation device for separating a fluid, said fluid comprising multiple components, into at least two components comprising:

a support structure;

at least one conduit mounted on or within said support structure for rotation about an axis;

at least one inlet for introducing a flow of said fluid into said at least one conduit; and

at least one outlet for outputting at least one of said components therefrom;

wherein the said at least one conduit is configured such that, in use, when said flow of said fluid is applied thereto, said conduit is thereby caused to rotate on or within said support structure about said axis, thereby separating said fluid into at least two components.

The said at least one conduit may be a separation tube.

The said at least one conduit may be configured such that, in use, when said flow of said fluid having a non-zero velocity component in a direction parallel to said axis is applied thereto, said conduit is thereby caused to rotate on or within said support structure about said axis, thereby separating said fluid into at least two components.

The said at least one conduit may be configured such that, in use, when a flow of said fluid in a direction substantially parallel to said axis is applied thereto, said conduit is caused thereby to rotate on or within said outer support structure about said axis, thereby separating said fluid into at least two components.

The said at least one conduit may be configured such that, in use, when said flow of said fluid is applied thereto from said inlet, said conduit is thereby caused to rotate on or within said support structure about said axis, thereby separating said fluid into at least two components.

The fluid may be comprised of at least one liquid phase. The fluid may be comprised of at least two liquid phases. The fluid may be comprised of an aqueous phase and an oil phase. The fluid may be comprised of at least one gaseous phase. The fluid may be comprised of an aqueous phase, an oil phase

and a gaseous phase. The fluid may be comprised of at least one solid phase. The fluid may be comprised of an aqueous phase, an oil phase, a gaseous phase and a solid phase, or any combination thereof.

5 The at least one conduit may comprise a tube. The tube may have a constant or varying diameter along its length. The tube may have a constant or varying internal diameter along its length. The tube may have a constant or varying external diameter along its length. The tube may be a cylindrical tube.

10 The at least one conduit may comprise one or more vanes attached to or formed integrally with the said conduit. The vanes may be turbine blades, impellers, propellers, stators, spiral internals, ribs, fins, or similar, or any combination thereof (all generally referred to herein as vanes).

The said vanes may be attached to or formed integrally with an inner surface of said conduit.

15 The said vanes may comprise a central axle. The vanes may freely rotate around the central axle. The central axle may comprise at least one of an inlet or an outlet.

The at least one conduit may be mounted on bearings. The bearings may contact either the outer or inner surface of the conduit. The bearings may be installed together with an appropriate type of seal arrangement.

20 The support structure may be an inner support structure such that it is disposed inside of at least one conduit. The support structure may be an outer support structure such that it is disposed outside of at least one conduit. The support structure may comprise a housing. The at least one conduit may be mounted on bearings inside or outside the support structure or housing.

The at least one outlet may comprise an overflow outlet. The overflow outlet may comprise a vortex finder.

The at least one outlet may comprise an underflow outlet.

The at least one inlet may be tangential to at least one conduit.

5 The separation device may further comprise an inlet chamber. The inlet chamber may be a swirl chamber. The swirl chamber helps to induce a rotational spin on the fluid prior to the fluid entering the conduit. The rotational spin of the fluid induced by the swirl chamber may be enhanced through use of a tangential inlet.

10 The diameter of at least one conduit may be between 3 mm and 3 m.

The diameter of the said at least one conduit may preferably be between 30 mm and 60 mm.

The length of at least one conduit may be between 40 mm and 3 m.

15 The length of at least one conduit may preferably be between 0.5 m and 1.1 m.

The at least one conduit may be a plurality of conduits.

The at least one inlet may introduce a flow of said fluid to said plurality of conduits.

20 The separation device may further comprise a generator. The generator may be an external generator. The at least one conduit may be configured such that, in use, when said flow of said fluid is applied thereto, said conduit is thereby caused to rotate about said axis, thereby causing the generator to generate electrical power.

The separation device may further comprise an electrostatic field generation device for generating an electrostatic field so that the fluid experiences an electrostatic force which enhances the separation efficiency of the separation device. The electrostatic field may be supplied so that at least one component of the fluid coalesces. The at least one component that coalesces may comprise droplets, particles or bubbles. The at least one component that coalesces may be a liquid phase, preferably an aqueous phase. The separation device may further comprise an electrostatic coalescer suitable for electrostatically coalescing at least one component in the fluid.

Electrical power for generating the electrostatic field may be at least partially generated by the generator.

According to a second aspect of the invention there is provided a method for separating a fluid, said fluid comprising multiple components, into at least two components using a separation device according to the first aspect of the invention, the method comprising the steps of:

introducing a flow of said fluid into said conduit, via said inlet;

thereby causing said conduit to rotate on or within said support structure about said axis, thereby separating said fluid into at least two components.

The said flow may have a non-zero velocity component in a direction parallel to the said axis of rotation.

The said flow may be in a direction substantially parallel to the said axis of rotation.

The fluid may be comprised of at least one liquid phase. The fluid may be comprised of at least two liquid phases. The fluid may be comprised of an

aqueous phase and an oil phase. The fluid may be comprised of at least one gaseous phase. The fluid may be comprised of an aqueous phase, an oil phase, and a gaseous phase. The fluid may be comprised of at least one solid phase. The fluid may be comprised of an aqueous phase, an oil phase, a gaseous phase, and a solid phase, or any combination thereof.

The at least one phase may comprise droplets, particles or bubbles with a diameter predominantly greater than 2 μm . That is, at least half of the droplets, particles or bubbles may have a diameter greater than 2 μm .

The pressure differential between an inlet and an outlet is dependent upon several parameters including the conduit diameter and length, the fluid flow rate, and the rotational speed of the conduit. The separation device can be designed to make full use of the available system pressure in order to optimise its performance. In a number of embodiments, the pressure of fluid in at least one outlet may not be more than 0.8 bar less than the pressure of fluid in at least one inlet.

The step of causing said conduit to rotate about said axis may cause a generator to generate electrical power.

An electrostatic field may be generated so that the fluid experiences an electrostatic force, which enhances the separation efficiency of the separation device. The electrostatic field may be supplied so that at least one component of the fluid coalesces. The at least one component that coalesces may comprise droplets, particles or bubbles. The at least one component that coalesces may be a liquid phase, preferably an aqueous phase. The method may further comprise electrostatically coalescing at least one component in the fluid.

Electrical power for supplying the electrostatic field may be at least partially generated by the generator.

Whilst the invention has been described above, it extends to any inventive combination of the features set out above, or in the following description, drawings or claims. For example, any feature described in relation with one
5 aspect of the invention is considered to be disclosed also in relation to any other aspect of the invention.

Embodiments of the present invention will now be described, by way of examples only, and with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

10 Figure 1 is a schematic cross-sectional view of a cyclone (prior art);

Figure 2 is a schematic cross-sectional view of a first exemplary embodiment of a separation device suitable for separating a fluid, said fluid comprising multiple components, into at least two components;

15 Figure 3 is a schematic cross-sectional view of a second exemplary embodiment of a separation device which does not comprise a housing;

Figure 4 is a schematic cross-sectional view of a third exemplary embodiment of a separation device with vanes outside of the separation tube.

Figure 5 is a schematic view of a third exemplary embodiment of a separation device containing a multiplicity of separation tubes;

20 Figure 6 is a schematic cross-sectional view of a fourth exemplary embodiment of a separation device containing a multiplicity of separation tubes in a horizontal orientation; and

Figure 7 is a schematic cross-sectional view of an exemplary embodiment of a separation device attached to a generator.

A first exemplary embodiment of the invention is shown in Figure 2. The separation device **10** comprises an outer support structure **12**, a conduit such as a separation tube **14**, an inlet nozzle **16**, an underflow outlet nozzle **18** and an overflow outlet nozzle **20**. In this embodiment the separation tube **14** is a cylindrical tube, although the invention is not limited by the geometry of the separation tube. The separation tube **14** can rotate about its longitudinal axis **13** relative to the outer support structure **12**. When in use the separation tube **14** contains a fluid mixture. The rotation of the separation tube **14** together with any rotational flow induced into the fluid at the inlet to the separation tube generates a centrifugal force causing denser components of the fluid to accumulate towards the walls of the separation tube **14** whereas the less dense components accumulate near the axis of rotation **13**. The separation tube **14** is mounted onto or within the outer support structure **12** by a series of bearings **22**, which enable free rotation of the separation tube, minimise the friction and reduce the rate of mechanical wear between the rotating separation tube **14** and the outer support structure **12**. The outer support structure **12** and the separation tube **14** may be designed to withstand the full upstream system pressure. In some embodiments the outer support structure **12** may comprise a housing **15**, which may be designed to withstand the full upstream system pressure, in which case the design pressure of the separation tube **14** could be reduced. Figure 3 shows a second exemplary embodiment of a separation device where the outer support structure **12** does not comprise a housing. Where the same reference numerals have been used in different exemplary embodiments, the reference numerals correspond to features that are identical. In a further embodiment the separation

tube **14** may be mounted to the outer support structure **12** at each end on a central shaft.

Fluid enters the inlet chamber **24** via the inlet nozzle **16**. The inlet chamber **24** is preferably cylindrical. The inlet nozzle **16** is preferentially tangential (either clockwise or anti-clockwise) to the cylindrical inlet chamber **24**, such that the rotational spin of the fluid is partially or fully established prior to entering the separation tube **14**. Further embodiments may include an inlet device, such as a swirl chamber, in the inlet chamber **24**, and an outlet device in the outlet chamber **25**. The inlet device or swirl chamber helps to induce a rotational spin on the inlet fluid prior to the fluid entering the separation tube. The inlet device or swirl chamber may comprise a vortex finder. The outlet device helps to segregate separated components of the inlet fluid.

The inlet nozzle **16** may be orientated axially. However, the invention is not limited by the orientation of the inlet nozzle **16** nor the incorporation of an inlet device, such as a swirl chamber. The fluid is forced under pressure from the inlet chamber **24** into the separation tube **14**. The internal bore of the separation tube **14** comprises vanes **26** which are attached to or integrally part of the internal surface of the separation tube **14**. A central axle **28** may be included to provide support to the vanes **26**. In some embodiments the vanes **26** may freely rotate around the central axle **28** and other internal components. The central axle **28** may be configured as a tube to enable the removal of the fluid collected at the central core or to allow the injection of an external fluid. As fluid flows along the separation tube **14**, and through the vanes **26**, a rotational force is generated causing the separation tube **14** to rotate about its longitudinal axis. The vanes **26**

are preferentially, although not necessarily, positioned at the downstream end of the separation tube **14** in order to minimise turbulence and shear forces in the separation section of the separation tube **14**. In one exemplary embodiment, shown in Figure 4, the vanes **27** are attached to, or formed integrally with, the downstream cross-sectional end of the separation tube **14**. In this embodiment the vanes **27** are located in the outlet chamber **25** rather than in the internal bore of the separation tube **14**. In other embodiments the vanes may be located in the inlet chamber **24** and attached to the upstream cross-sectional end of the separation tube **14**. The vanes **26** or **27** may be configured such that they, and hence the separation tube **14**, are caused to rotate when subjected to a fluid flow that has a non-zero velocity component parallel to the axis of rotation, that is to say an axial velocity component. In another embodiment the vanes **26** or **27** may be configured such that they, and hence the separation tube **14**, are caused to rotate when subjected to a fluid flow that has a non-zero velocity component perpendicular to the axis of rotation, that is to say a radial velocity component. Where sufficient inlet pressure is available, additional vanes **26** may be installed to increase the rotation speed of the tube, and the resultant centrifugal force. If a longer residence time could be beneficial, or if it is deemed to be beneficial to the process the length or the diameter of the separation tube **14** could be increased.

The rotation of the separation tube **14** together with any rotational spin induced at the fluid inlet maintains or increases the spiral or rotating flow profile of the fluid. The rotation of the fluid mixture within the separation tube **14** establishes a vortex in the fluid mixture. A centrifugal force causes denser

components of the fluid mixture to accumulate towards the walls of the separation tube **14** whereas the less dense components accumulate near the axis of rotation. The denser components of the fluid mixture may be extracted using underflow outlet nozzle **18** or outlet nozzle **31**. Further embodiments may include multiple outlet nozzles. In further embodiments separated solids **35** can be accumulated in a quiescent zone either to an accumulation zone **36** via slots in the wall of the separation tube **37** or to an accumulation zone **38** beyond the rotating separation tube, where they may be removed respectively using a jetting or fluidisation device or an alternative established method, for example via nozzles **32** or **33**. The less dense components may be extracted from an overflow outlet nozzle **20**, or via an additional underflow nozzle **31**. In further embodiments the overflow outlet nozzle **20** may include a vortex finder **30**. The separation device can be installed in any orientation including horizontal or vertical since the centrifugal forces created are such that the external impact of gravity is minimal.

A third exemplary embodiment of the invention is shown in Figure 5. The separation device **50** comprises an outer support structure **52**, which may be designed to withstand the full upstream system pressure, and a multiplicity of separation tubes **54**. In this embodiment each separation tube in the multiplicity of separation tubes **54** is considered to be cylindrical. Each separation tube of the multiplicity of separation tubes **54** may rotate independently of the other separation tubes along the longitudinal axis. When in use, each separation tube of the multiplicity of separation tubes **54** contains a fluid mixture. The rotation of each individual separation tube together with any rotational flow induced into the

fluid at the inlet to the separation tube generates a centrifugal force which causes denser components of the fluid to accumulate towards the wall of said rotating separation tube whereas the less dense components accumulate near the axis of rotation. The multiplicity of separation tubes **54** is mounted inside the outer support structure **52** by a series of bearings **55**, which enable free rotation of the separation tubes, minimise the friction and reduce the rate of mechanical wear between the rotating separation tubes and the outer support structure **52**.

Fluid enters the separation device **50** via the inlet nozzle **56**. Further embodiments may include multiple inlet nozzles. The fluid is forced under pressure from the inlet chamber **58** into the multiplicity of separation tubes **54**. Further embodiments may include an inlet device **57**, such as a swirl chamber in the inlet, and an outlet device **59** on the main outlet of each separation tube of the multiplicity of separation tubes **54**. The inlet device, or swirl chamber **57**, helps to induce a rotational spin to the inlet fluid, and may comprise a vortex finder. The outlet device **59** helps to segregate separated components of the inlet fluid. The inlet device **57** and the outlet device **59** may independently be used in conjunction with all embodiments of the present invention, including the embodiments shown in Figures 2 and 3. The separation tubes **54** may be mounted on a tube-plate **60** at each end. The tube-plates **60** provide mechanical support to and form a seal at each end of the multiplicity of separation tubes **54** and of the inlet and outlet devices **57** and **59**.

The internal bore of each separation tube of the multiplicity of separation tubes **54** comprises vanes **62** which are attached to or formed integrally with the internal surface of the said separation tube. A central axle **64** may be included to

provide support to the vanes **62** and other internal components. In some embodiments the vanes **62** may freely rotate around the central axle **64** and other internal components. The central axle **64** may be configured as a tube to enable the removal of the fluid collected at the central core, or may allow the injection of an external fluid. As fluid flows along each separation tube of the multiplicity of separation tubes **54**, and through the vanes **62**, a rotational force is generated which causes the said separation tube to rotate about its longitudinal axis. The vanes **62** are preferentially although not necessarily positioned at the downstream end of each separation tube of the multiplicity of separation tubes **54** in order to minimise turbulence and shear forces in the separation section of the device. Where sufficient inlet pressure is available, additional vanes **62** may be installed to increase the rotation speed of each separation tube in the multiplicity of separation tubes **54**, and the resultant centrifugal force. If a longer residence time could be beneficial, the length or the diameter of the multiplicity of separation tubes **54** could be increased.

The rotation of each separation tube in the multiplicity of separation tubes **54** induces the fluid mixture inside said separation tube to have a spiral or rotating flow profile. Further, the rotation of each separation tube in the multiplicity of separation tubes **54**, together with any rotational flow induced into the fluid at the fluid inlet, maintains or increases the spiral or rotating flow profile of the fluid, and generates a centrifugal force within each separation tube in the multiplicity of separation tubes **54**. The rotation of the fluid within each separation tube of the multiplicity of separation tubes **54** establishes a vortex in the fluid mixture inside said separation tube, which is maintained and reinforced

by the rotation of said separation tube. The centrifugal force causes denser components of the fluid mixture to accumulate towards the walls of each rotating separation tube whereas the less dense components accumulate near the axis of rotation. The denser components of the fluid mixture may be extracted using the underflow outlet nozzle **66**. Further embodiments may include multiple underflow outlet nozzles. The less dense components may be extracted from the overflow outlet nozzle **68**, or via an additional underflow nozzle **76**.

In further embodiments separated solids **70** can be accumulated in a quiescent zone either to an accumulation zone **71** via slots in the wall of the separation tube **72** or to an accumulation zone **73** beyond the rotating separation tube, where they may be removed using a jetting or fluidisation device or an alternative established method, for example via nozzles **74** or **75** respectively.

Further embodiments may include multiple overflow outlet nozzles.

Improved turndown may be achieved by segmenting the separation tubes into a number of compartments with their own inlet and / or outlet nozzle(s), or by mechanically, hydraulically or electrically isolating, or restricting individual separation tubes or multiples of separation tubes.

A modification of the third exemplary embodiment, separation device **50**, is shown as a fourth exemplary embodiment in Figure 6. Where the same reference numerals have been used in different exemplary embodiments, the reference numerals correspond to features that are identical. The separation device **80** comprises an outer support structure **52** and a multiplicity of separation tubes **54** in a horizontal orientation. The present invention is not

limited by the orientation of the multiplicity of the separation tubes **54**. The separation tubes **54** encourage denser solid particles to pass through slots in the wall of the separation tube **72** upstream of the tube-plate **60c**. The separated solid particles **70** may be collected in an accumulation zone **73**, where they can
5 be removed via outlet nozzle **81** or **82**. Due to the removal of solid particles upstream of the tube-plate **60c**, it is not necessary to incorporate outlet devices **59** or any further downstream tube-plates in this exemplary embodiment, although either or both of these may be included in alternative embodiments.

Further embodiments to the above described embodiments of the
10 separation device are provided hereinafter.

Some exemplary embodiments of the invention may include baffles along the length of the separation tube in order to further enhance its performance.

Embodiments of the invention may include vanes which are or whose mechanism is larger in diameter than the separation tube.

15 Embodiments of the invention may include vanes whose pitch can be adjusted either manually or automatically.

Embodiments of the invention may include automated monitoring and/or adjustment of the rotational speed of each separation tube.

Embodiments of the invention may include a mechanism such as a screw
20 conveyor or scraper to move collected solids from the internal wall of the separation tube towards the solids accumulation zone or discharge nozzle.

Embodiments of the invention may include a porous or slotted separator tube wall allowing for the incorporation of a filtration or membrane inner wall, which would allow the retention of components of an appropriate size or

characteristic at or adjoining the internal wall of the separation tube and/or the passage of components of another appropriate size or characteristic into the accumulation zone.

Embodiments of the invention may include a gas blanket around the separation tube or conduit in order to further minimise friction loss due to being immersed in liquid at the outside wall.

Embodiments of the invention may include injecting gas into the incoming fluid mixture in order to create an enhanced induced gas flotation effect and, thereby improve separation efficiency.

Embodiments of the invention may include injecting a coagulant upstream in order to further improve separation efficiency.

Embodiments of the invention may include adding a dilution liquid upstream in order to further improve separation efficiency.

Embodiments of the invention may include connection to a generator. The generator may be an external generator **84** as shown in Figure 7. The rotation of the separation tube **14** causes the generator to generate electrical power. Where the same reference numerals have been used in different exemplary embodiments, the reference numerals correspond to features that are identical. The external generator **84** is attached via an axle **86** to the separation tube **14**. The rotation of the separation tube **14** thereby provides power to the external generator **84**.

Embodiments of the invention may include the use of an electrostatic field within the separation tube. Methods of using an electrostatic field to enhance the separation efficiency of a separation device are known in the art. For example,

electrostatic coalescers are commonly used in liquid/liquid separation processes including in the upstream oil and gas market for the dehydration and desalting of crude oil prior to its delivery to a refinery. These known methods may be adapted for use in conjunction with all embodiments of the present invention.

5 The electrical power for the electrostatic field may be generated using a generator.

Embodiments of the invention may include connection to a generator and the use of an electrostatic field within the separation tube, wherein the rotation of the separation tube thereby causes the generator to generate electrical power,
10 and the electrical power for the electrostatic field is at least partially generated by the said generator.

Embodiments of the invention may include gas turbo-expander blades at a gas outlet to further improve the separation efficiency or increase energy recovery.

15 Embodiments of the invention may include Pelton or Francis or Kaplan type vanes or turbine blades on the internal or external wall of the separation tube to further improve the separation efficiency or increase energy recovery should surplus system pressure or fluid be available.

Some embodiments may be suitable for retrofitting within existing liquid-
20 liquid or solid-liquid cyclone vessels in order to improve separation efficiency or improve processing capacity or to operate at a lower pressure drop or a combination thereof.

Exemplary embodiments of the invention may provide a separation device for separating a fluid mixture into at least two components under centrifugal

force where a continuous throughput may be achieved without a significant drop in pressure between the fluid mixture entering and exiting the separation device. The invention therefore allows a higher throughput capacity of fluid mixture and/or increased separation efficiency compared to known cyclones of a similar diameter.

A separation device according to various aspects may be suitable for gas/solid, liquid/solid, liquid/liquid, and liquid/gas phase separation or a combination of more than two phases. The fluid mixture may comprise any combination of gases or multiple immiscible liquids of varying densities or solid particles. The separation device could simultaneously de-water, de-oil, de-gas and de-sand or any combination thereof a fluid mixture from an oilfield well or similar process stream, whilst operating at similar or higher efficiency and/or with a lower pressure drop than cyclones.

The separation efficiency of a separation device according to exemplary embodiments approaches those achievable by a centrifuge, whilst not requiring an external motor drive, and exhibiting similar space, weight and cost benefits of a cyclone. The centrifugal force for separation is generated by rotation of at least one conduit where the fluid mixture passes through internal or external vanes, which by virtue of the fluids passing through them impart rotational force on the conduit. The rotational speed of the separation tube imparts and maintains centrifugal forces on the fluid mixture such that separation of the fluid mixture is achieved. An external power supply or external motor is therefore not necessary for the operation of the present invention, although may be incorporated to further improve the separation efficiency or operability of the separation device.

Furthermore the present separation device does not require the extent of external seals, bearings, and associated external cooling and lubrication circuits, which are typically needed for the operation of centrifuges.

Embodiments of the present invention can be used as a unit operation in association with other upstream or downstream equipment such as separators, cyclones, flotation units, membranes, coalescers, filters, centrifuges, pumps or valves etc, and additional units of this separation device.

The present invention may find uses in upstream oil and gas (onshore, offshore and subsea), waste-water treatment, minerals processing, mining, pulp and paper processing, nuclear, pharmaceutical, medical, food, drink or automotive applications. One further use may be in the removal of particles or dust from a gas stream operating either under pressure or a vacuum, where the lower pressure drop compared to a cyclone separator would be more energy efficient.

It will be appreciated by a person skilled in the art, from the foregoing description, that modifications and variations can be made to the described embodiments without departing from the scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

Claims

1. A separation device for separating a fluid, said fluid comprising multiple components, into at least two components comprising:

5 a support structure;

at least one conduit mounted on or within said support structure for rotation about an axis, wherein said at least one conduit is a tube, comprising one or more vanes attached to or formed integrally with said conduit;

10 at least one inlet for introducing a flow of said fluid into said at least one conduit; and

at least one outlet for outputting at least one of said components therefrom, wherein the at least one outlet comprises an overflow outlet, and the overflow outlet comprises a vortex finder;

15 wherein the said at least one conduit is configured such that, in use, when said flow of said fluid is applied thereto, said conduit is thereby caused to rotate on or within said support structure about said axis, thereby separating said fluid into at least two components.

2. A separation device according to claim 1 in which the said at least one conduit is configured such that, in use, when said flow of said fluid having a non-
20 zero velocity component in a direction parallel to said axis is applied thereto, said conduit is thereby caused to rotate on or within said support structure about said axis, thereby separating said fluid into at least two components.

3. A separation device according to claim 1 or 2 in which the said at least one conduit is configured such that, in use, when said flow of said fluid in a direction

substantially parallel to said axis is applied thereto, said conduit is thereby caused to rotate on or within said support structure about said axis, thereby separating said fluid into at least two components.

4. A separation device according to any previous claim in which the said at least one conduit is configured such that, in use, when said flow of said fluid is applied thereto from said inlet, said conduit is thereby caused to rotate on or within said support structure about said axis, thereby separating said fluid into at least two components.

5. A separation device according to any previous claim in which the fluid is comprised of at least one liquid phase.

6. A separation device according to claim 5 in which the fluid is comprised of at least two liquid phases.

7. A separation device according to any previous claim in which the fluid is comprised of at least one gaseous phase.

8. A separation device according to any of claims 5 to 7 in which the fluid is comprised of at least one solid phase.

9. A separation device according to any previous claim in which the said vanes are attached to or formed integrally with an inner or outer surface of said conduit.

10. A separation device according to claim 9 in which the said vanes comprise a central axle.

11. A separation device according to claim 10 in which the central axle comprises at least one of an inlet or an outlet.

12. A separation device according to any previous claim in which the at least one conduit is mounted on bearings.

13. A separation device according to any previous claim in which the support structure comprises an inner support structure.

5 14. A separation device according to any previous claim in which the support structure comprises an outer support structure.

15. A separation device according to any previous claim in which the support structure comprises a housing.

10 16. A separation device according to claim 15 in which the at least one conduit is mounted on bearings inside said housing.

17. A separation device according to any previous claim in which the at least one outlet is an underflow outlet.

18. A separation device according to any previous claim in which the at least one inlet is tangential to at least one conduit.

15 19. A separation device according to any previous claim in which the separation device further comprises an inlet chamber.

20. A separation device according to claim 19 in which the inlet chamber comprises a swirl chamber.

20 21. A separation device according to any previous claim in which the diameter of at least one conduit is between 3 mm and 3 m.

22. A separation device according to claim 21 in which the diameter of the said at least one conduit is preferably between 30 mm and 60 mm.

23. A separation device according to any previous claim in which the length of at least one conduit is between 40 mm and 3m.

24. A separation device according to claim 23 in which the length of at least one conduit is preferably between 0.5 m and 1.1 m.

25. A separation device according to any previous claim in which the at least one conduit is a plurality of conduits.

5 26. A separation device according to claim 25 in which the at least one inlet introduces a flow of said fluid to said plurality of conduits.

27. A separation device according to any previous claim further comprising an electrostatic field generation device for generating an electrostatic field so that the fluid experiences an electrostatic force which enhances the separation
10 efficiency of the separation device.

28. A method for separating a fluid, said fluid comprising multiple components, into at least two components using a separation device according to claim 1, the method comprising the steps of:

introducing a flow of said fluid into said conduit, via said inlet;

15 thereby causing said conduit to rotate on or within said support structure about said axis, thereby separating said fluid into at least two components.

29. A method according to claim 28 in which the said flow having a non-zero velocity component in a direction parallel to the said axis of rotation.

30. A method according to claim 28 or 29 in which the said flow is in a direction
20 substantially parallel to said axis of rotation.

31. A method according to any one of claims 28 to 30 in which the fluid is comprised of at least one liquid phase.

32. A method according to claim 31 in which the fluid is comprised of at least two liquid phases.

33. A method according to any of claims 28 to 32 in which the fluid is comprised of at least one gaseous phase.

34. A method according to any of claims 31 to 33 in which the fluid is comprised of at least one solid phase.

5 35. A method according to claim 31 or 34 in which the at least one phase comprises droplets, particles or bubbles with a diameter predominantly greater than 2 μm .

36. A method according to any of claims 28 to 35 in which the pressure of fluid in at least one outlet is not more than 0.8 bar less than the pressure of fluid in at
10 least one inlet.

37. A method according to any of claims 28 to 36 in which an electrostatic field is generated so that the fluid experiences an electrostatic force which enhances the separation efficiency of the separation device.