CLAIMS

1. A blowout preventer assembly comprising an annular blow out preventer having an annular packing unit and an actuator operable to reduce the internal diameter of the annular packing unit, ~~wherein~~ the assembly further ~~comprises~~ comprising a stripping sleeve having a tubular elastomeric sleeve which in use is positioned generally centrally of the packing unit so that the packing unit surrounds at least a portion of the elastomeric sleeve~~.~~ characterized in that the

~~2. A blowout preventer assembly according to claim 1 wherein the~~ actuator comprises a piston movable generally parallel to the longitudinal axis of the ~~BOP~~ blowout preventer by the supply of pressurised fluid to the annular blow out preventer.

~~3~~2. A blowout preventer assembly according to any preceding claim wherein the stripping sleeve further comprises two annular support parts, the elastomeric sleeve being positioned between the two support parts.

~~4~~3. A blowout preventer assembly according to claim ~~3~~ 2 wherein the outer diameter of each of the support parts is greater than the outer diameter of the elastomeric sleeve.

~~5~~4. A blowout preventer assembly according to claim ~~4~~ 3 wherein the annular packing unit comprises an elastomeric body and at least one generally rigid insert, the insert lying at least partially between the two annular support parts when the annular packing unit engages with the elastomeric sleeve.

~~6~~5. A blowout preventer assembly according to claim ~~5~~ 4 wherein the annular packing unit comprises first and second generally rigid inserts, the elastomeric body lying between the first and second inserts and the first insert being at a first end of the annular packing unit adjacent to one of the support

parts and the second insert being at a second end of the annular packing unit adjacent to the other of the support parts, both inserts lying at least partially between the two support parts when the packing unit is engaged with the elastomeric sleeve.

~~7~~6. A blowout preventer assembly according to any one of claims ~~3~~ 2 to ~~6~~ 5 wherein the inner diameter each of the support parts is substantially the same as the inner diameter of the elastomeric sleeve.

~~8~~7. A blowout preventer assembly according to any one of claims ~~3~~ 2 to ~~7~~ 6 wherein each support part is provided with a circular ridge which extends into an end of the elastomeric sleeve.

~~9~~8. A blowout preventer assembly according to any preceding claim wherein the maximum outer diameter of the stripping sleeve is less than the inner diameter of the annular packing unit when the packing unit is not being acted on by the actuator.

~~10~~9. A blowout preventer assembly according to any preceding claim wherein the stripping sleeve further comprises a polymeric sealing element which is arranged radially inwardly of the elastomeric sleeve.

~~11~~10. A blowout preventer assembly according to claim 9 wherein the polymeric sealing element contains a plurality of apertures into which the elastomeric sleeve extends.

~~12. A blowout preventer assembly including two annular blow out preventers and stripping sleeves having any of the features set out in any preceding claim, wherein the two annular blow out preventers are arranged around a common central passage and are longitudinally displaced with respect to one another along the common central passage, and the two stripping sleeves are connected by means of a tubular connector.~~

~~13. A blowout preventer assembly according to claim 11 wherein the packing units and actuators of the annular blow out preventers are contained in a housing which encloses the common central passage, there being a conduit provided in the housing to connect the volume of the common central passage between the two annular blow out preventers with the exterior of the housing.~~

~~14. A blowout preventer assembly substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and as shown in the accompanying drawings.~~

~~15. A method of operating a blowout preventer assembly according to claim 12, the blow out preventer assembly being subjected to fluid at a first pressure at a first end of the assembly and to fluid at a second pressure at a second end of the assembly, the method comprising connecting to the conduit provided in the housing to fluid at a third pressure, the third pressure being higher than the first pressure and lower that the second pressure.~~

~~16. Any novel feature or novel combination of features described herein and/or in the accompanying drawings.~~