

MEGINRÁÐ

RESEARCH

Megin · Ráð - Essential Strength, Sovereign Governance

UKCS Decommissioning: The Briefing

Five-minute summary for operators' decommissioning teams · companion to the Practitioner Guide and the Theoretical Guide · not peer reviewed

Dr J. Neil Scott · DBA (Durham) · MBA (Henley) · BSc Eng (Napier) · CEng MIET · FHEA · CFII
Founder · Meginráð Research · Orkney, Scotland · jnscott@meginrao.com · meginrao.com

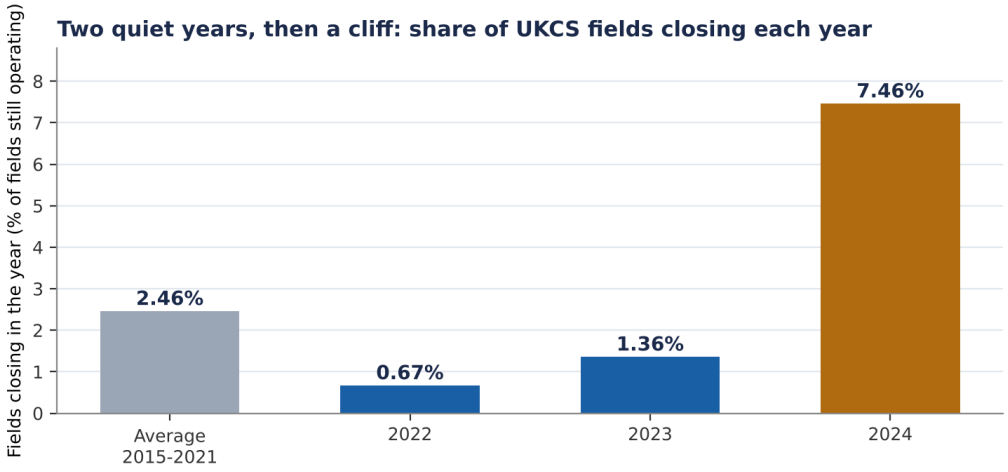
Practitioner Briefing V1 · based on White Paper V10.2 and the 24 October 2026 build record

29 October 2026

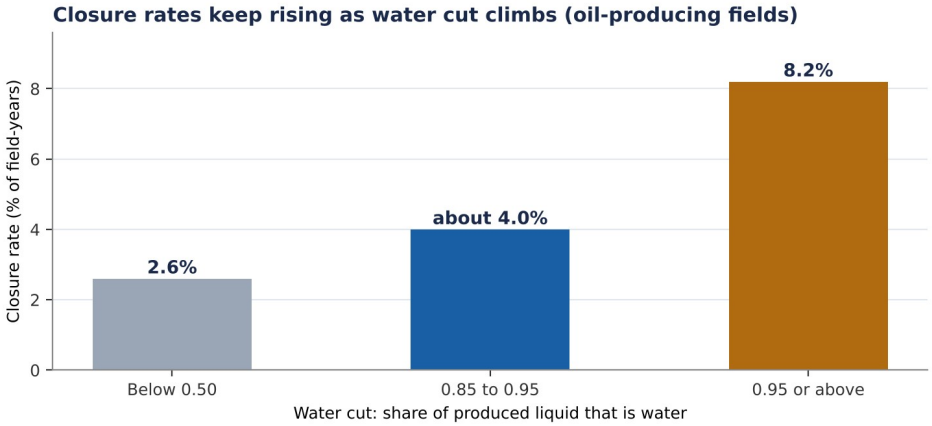
Fields are closing faster than before 2022, they close sooner when they are wet and have stopped drilling, and the document set behind a closure is often the slowest and least consistent part of the job.

What the research shows

- **2024 was an outlier.** 22 fields closed: 7.46% of operating fields, about 1 in 13, against 2.46% (about 1 in 41) in an average year from 2015 to 2021.
- **Wet fields close more.** Oil fields at or above 85% water close at about twice the rate of others. 51 of 157 oil fields still producing in 2024 are above that line. It is a warning sign, not a viability limit.
- **Drilling matters.** Each year without a development well adds about 5% to a field's closure risk.
- **Oil price does not explain 2024.** The timing fits the Energy Profits Levy escalations. Causation is not established.
- **Pipeline probabilities are withdrawn.** Earlier hub figures could not be reproduced. Audited feeder counts are reported instead (Forties: 19 of 66 feeders at or above 0.85; FUKA 3 of 13; Norpipe 1 of 7; FLAGS 2 of 2).



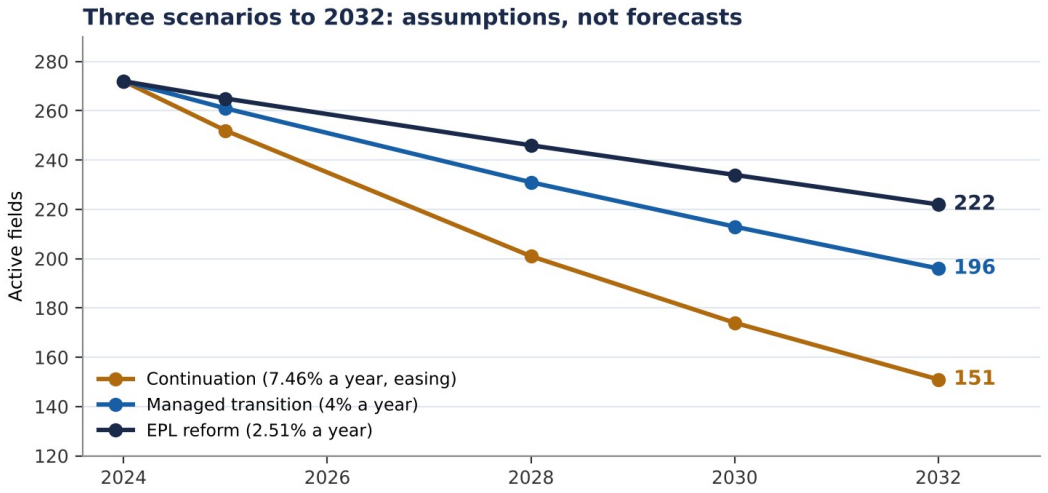
Share of operating fields closing each year. One convention: closures in a year over fields not yet closed at the end of the previous year.



Closure rate by water cut, oil-producing fields after 2010. Bands between 0.50 and 0.85 are not shown.

Where closures could go: three scenarios

To show what different closure rates imply, we projected operating fields from 272 in 2024. These are arithmetic on stated assumptions, not forecasts.



Operating fields under three closure-rate assumptions (N0 = 272; rates 7.46%, 2.51% and 4.0%).

Reform keeps 71 more fields operating in 2032 than continuation (222 against 151). That does **not** show it raises more revenue: reform needs per-field taxable profit to rise by roughly 58% to break even on tax take, so the earlier £0.9bn claim is withdrawn. The useful reading is the range: how many fields head for closure in the early 2030s depends on policy and investment choices not yet made.

What the decommissioning documents show

We read **363 public decommissioning documents** (203 programmes, 70 environmental assessments, 55 comparative assessments, 35 close-out reports). Counts are of documents read, not of the UKCS.

- Of 13 close-out reports with both an estimate and an outturn, **8 ran over budget** and 5 came in under. A sample, not a rate.
- At least **10 close-out reports** cite weather or vessel availability as a cause of slippage.
- Costs are commonly withheld or given to OPRED in confidence, which limits public benchmarking.
- Extraction notes record contradictions inside documents. These are unaudited, so we quote no rate.

A check before the gate

A submission is written by several teams over many months, and nobody is formally asked whether the whole set agrees with itself. The **Pre-Submission Consistency Review** is an independent, fixed-fee check that the documents reconcile with each other and with published requirements before a gate, across six gates and sixteen checks.

Gate	Question the documents should answer
G0 Cessation planning	Are scope, cost basis and timing defined?
G1 Option assessment	Are options complete, screened and scored defensibly?
G2 Programme submission	Do the programme and environmental assessment match the CA outcome and each other?

Gate	Question the documents should answer
G3 Pre-dismantling readiness	Is the revised safety case accepted and the verification scheme revised?
G4 Phase transition	Before each phase, are risks, the safety-critical element record and verification updated?
G5 Close-out	Are clearance, monitoring commitments and lessons recorded?

No-cost pilot

Sixteen checks over two weeks on one approved public document set (for example, one of your own approved programmes), with a findings table and a one-page readiness summary. No obligation. Request one at **meginrao.com** or **jnscott@meginrao.com**.

Five things to do now

- ☐ List each field’s latest water cut and the date of its last development well.
- ☐ Test your cessation timeline against vessel and weather availability, especially if several assets could close within two or three years.
- ☐ For each shared pipeline, record feeder numbers and ask the host operator how tariffs are expected to move.
- ☐ Before each gate, reconcile quantities, options, costs and emissions figures across the document set.
- ☐ Ask for the no-cost pilot.

Gate model v0.1 is proposed; G0, G1, G2 and G5 are being confirmed against OPRED guidance, and G3 and G4 rest on SI 2015/398 and HSE IS 2/2008 and 3/2006. Findings are exploratory, not proof of cause or forecasts. The review is not a regulatory approval or design review and does not replace your verifier or assurance.