



# Guideline

## Noise Exposure Standard

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### 1. Summary

This paper clarifies the noise exposure standards that NOPSA will enforce at offshore facilities, under the *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006* (OPGGSA) of the Commonwealth and the *Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Act 1982* of each State and Northern Territory (PSLA).

### 2. Legislative Basis

The overriding legislative requirements are the duties of care that are set out in clauses 9 to 15 of Schedule 3 of the OPGGSA 2006, and in the corresponding clauses of the PSLAs 1982. These clauses establish that all duty holders must take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure the health and safety of persons affected by their activities. This encompasses any risks to health and safety that may arise through exposure to noise.

In addition, the *Petroleum (Submerged Lands) (Management of Safety on Offshore Facilities) Regulations 1996* require the operator of any facility to identify all hazards to health and safety, assess the risks and put in place control measures that reduce the risks to as low as reasonably practicable, and to do all this within a comprehensive and integrated management system. Again, these obligations encompass the hazards, risks, control measures and management of noise.

None of the above establishes any overriding limit to noise exposure. However, there is a nationally agreed exposure standard for occupational noise, which is set out in the National Standard for Occupational Noise, NOHSC:1007(2000), published by the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission. The exposure standard is currently an eight-hour equivalent continuous A-weighted sound pressure level, LAeq,8h, of 85dB(A) and a C-weighted peak sound pressure level, LCpeak, of 140 dB(C).

During the project to establish NOPSA, it was agreed through consultation that the nationally agreed exposure standard for noise would be adopted under the OPGGSA 2006 and PSLAs 1982. Accordingly, the National Standard for Occupational Noise is called up by regulation 4F of the *Petroleum (Submerged Lands) (Occupational Health and Safety) Regulations 1993* of the Commonwealth, and by equivalent regulations for each State and Northern Territory (for example regulation 609 of the *Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Regulations 2004* of Victoria).

### 3. Clarification

The wording of the relevant items in NOHSC:1007(2000) is as follows:

**3.1** The national standard for exposure to noise in the occupational environment is an eight-hour equivalent continuous A-weighted sound pressure level, LAeq,8h, of 85dB(A). For peak noise, the national standard is a C-weighted peak sound pressure level, LCpeak, of 140dB(C).

**3.2** The exposure to noise is taken to be that measured at the employee's ear position without taking into account any protection which may be afforded by personal hearing protectors.

Item 3.2 appears to mean that it is not allowable for the noise exposure standard to be met in any way that relies, partly or wholly, on the use of personal hearing protectors. Whilst this is a desirable long-term goal, it must be recognised that it is not always practicable to achieve, and the PSL Regulations as initially written did not allow for this.

The intent is that noise exposure should be controlled in the first instance by implementing all reasonably practicable engineering measures, to reduce noise emission. If that does not result in the exposure standard being met, then all reasonably practicable administrative controls should be implemented, to reduce personnel exposure. If that still does not result in the exposure standard being met, then personal hearing protectors may be used, but it should be stressed that this is acceptable only if the noise exposure standard cannot reasonably be met by the engineering or administrative approaches.

### 4. Legislation Amendment

Commonwealth Department of Industry Tourism and Resources has arranged for amendment of regulation 4F, so that it is not an offence to exceed the NOHSC:1007(2000) noise exposure standard, provided that:

- the duty holder manages noise in a manner consistent with the provisions of the National Code of Practice for Occupational Noise NOHSC:2009(2004); and
- the level of noise exposure, after allowing for the protection offered by hearing protectors, does not exceed an LAeq,8h of 85dB(A) or an LCpeak of 140dB(C).

The amendment took effect on 1 September 2005, and achieves the intent set out in section 3. The amendment applies in Commonwealth waters, and also in Northern Territory.

Now that the Commonwealth regulations have been amended, NOPSA has requested mirror amendments under the PSLA 1982 of the relevant States.

## 5. Compliance and Enforcement

Pending the amendments to the mirror legislation in State waters, NOPSA's compliance and enforcement action relative to noise in those areas will be based on the proposed amended form of regulation.

However, duty holders should note that the occupational noise exposure standard sets a maximum exposure standard, and does not override the requirement for the risk to health and safety from noise exposure to be reduced to the lowest reasonably practicable level at all times and at all locations.

NOPSA will expect the level of noise to be managed to below the standard, without any need to rely on hearing protection, wherever that is reasonably practicable.

## 6. Noise Levels in Living Quarters, Offices etc

NOPSA expects that noise levels in areas such as controls rooms, offices, cabins and dining/recreation areas will be significantly below the exposure standard for occupational noise. Suitable noise levels for living quarters, offices, etc at fixed platforms are set out in Australian Standard AS/NZS 2107-2000, and for vessels and offshore mobile platforms are set out in AS 2254-1988.

## 7. References

[Petroleum \(Submerged Lands\) \(Occupational Health and Safety\) Regulations 1993](#)

[National Standard for Occupational Noise, NOHSC:1007\(2000\)](#),  
National Occupational Health and Safety Commission

[National Code of Practice for Occupational Noise NOHSC:2009\(2004\)](#)  
National Occupational Health and Safety Commission

[Australian Standard AS/NZS 2107-2000](#)

Acoustics - Recommended design sound levels and reverberation times for building interiors  
Standards Australia

[Australian Standard AS 2254-1988](#)

Acoustics - Recommended noise levels for various areas of occupancy in vessels and offshore mobile platforms  
Standards Australia

## 8. Disclaimer

This Guideline and others provided on NOPSA's website are intended to provide general guidance to the industry as to the approach that NOPSA takes in carrying out its regulatory functions under powers conferred by the Commonwealth, State and NT Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Acts and Regulations under those Acts. These Guidelines should not be relied on as advice on the law, nor treated as a substitute for legal advice in any relevant situation.