

# Drilling operations set to begin at Cote d'Ivoire

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ASX-LISTED oil and gas explorer Rialto Energy has announced that it expects to spud its Gazelle-P3 well and begin drilling operations in offshore Cote d'Ivoire before mid-March.

The Gazelle-P3 well will be the first of the company's scheduled three-well drilling program at its 85 per cent owned and operated CI-202 block. In an ASX release, Rialto reported that it anticipated Gazelle-P3 would take between 60 and 70 days to drill and test, with the overall drilling program planned to be completed in about six months.

The company stated that the Transocean GSF Monitor drilling rig had been released to Rialto and was being towed from Nigeria to Cote d'Ivoire at the end of February.

"We have been awaiting the rig arrival for some time and we are excited to be starting our drilling program in Block CI-202 along with our partner Petroci [Cote d'Ivoire's national oil company]," Rialto managing director Jeff Schrull said in the release.

Speaking at a media presentation in mid-February, Rialto's then chairman Glenn Whiddon said that the objective of the drilling program was to convert

contingent resources to reserves, with the plan to start producing from all wells in the company's Cote d'Ivoire block by the end of 2013. He said that a final investment decision was expected by May following flow testing of the wells.

Mr Whiddon added that Rialto was originally disinterested in farming down its stake in the block because the company believed its working interests could not be replaced with anything of similar quality. However, he said that going forward Rialto

hoped to attract other parties.

"We don't want to be here in five years' time still developing the Ivory Coast on our own. We'd like to either farm out, consolidate, [or] merge with somebody in two to three years' time," Mr Whiddon said.

Rialto also has an interest in the Apache-operated WA-399-P block in the

Carnarvon Basin of WA and is currently working towards receiving approval for a 20 per cent paying interest in the Tap Oil-operated Accra block offshore Ghana.

Most recently, Rialto announced the appointment of Bruce Burrows as its new chairman, subsequently making Mr Whiddon a non-executive director.