THE WHISTLER NEWSPAPER · NIGERIA · OFFSHORE

Nigeria's NUPRC advances 2026 40-block licensing round while deepening academic partnerships

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Nigeria's upstream regulator, the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC), has formally opened a registration portal for its 2026 licensing round, advancing the process for a package of 40 blocks that spans the country's full range of upstream acreage. The move marks a concrete procedural step forward, confirming that the round is now actively accepting participants rather than remaining at the announcement stage. Coverage from multiple Nigerian outlets — including Business News Nigeria and Nigerian NewsDirect — corroborates the sustained traction the round is gaining across the Nigerian business media landscape.

The 40 blocks on offer are divided across three categories: 17 onshore blocks, 14 shallow-water blocks, and nine deepwater blocks. NUPRC has also published the full list of blocks included in the round, giving prospective investors their first detailed look at the specific acreage on offer. The simultaneous offering across all depth categories signals the regulator's intent to attract a broad spectrum of investors — from independents and local companies targeting onshore and shallow-water positions to international majors and large-cap independents with deepwater capabilities.

In a parallel development, NUPRC has entered into a partnership with the University of Benin (UNIBEN) aimed at deepening research in Nigeria's petroleum sector. While details of the specific research agenda and deliverables have not been disclosed in

available reporting, the collaboration reflects the regulator's broader institutional development agenda under the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) framework. NUPRC — established under that 2021 legislation — has been progressively building out its mandate, and academic partnerships of this kind are consistent with efforts to build local technical capacity alongside the push to accelerate acreage licensing.

The round comes as Nigeria works to reinvigorate upstream investment following a prolonged period of regulatory uncertainty that preceded and accompanied the PIA's passage. The Act's restructured fiscal and regulatory framework will govern the terms of any awards, with signature bonuses, work programme commitments, and production-sharing arrangements central to investor assessments of block attractiveness. The breakdown of the offering reflects the diversity of Nigeria's hydrocarbon geology: onshore blocks in the Niger Delta remain attractive for gas monetisation and marginal oil plays, shallow-water acreage has historically hosted major producing fields tied to fixed platforms and jackup drilling programmes, and the nine deepwater blocks are likely to draw attention from operators with existing deepwater infrastructure in the region.

With the portal now open and the full block list published, the round has moved into active qualification and registration phase. Prospective participants would typically be expected to complete technical and financial qualification before accessing seismic and well data packages. Specific timelines for data room access, bid submission deadlines, and award dates have not been disclosed in available reporting. It also remains unclear whether the round will proceed through a competitive bidding process or direct negotiations for specific block categories. Business News Nigeria's continued coverage of NUPRC activities — now extending to both the licensing round and the UNIBEN partnership — suggests the regulator is maintaining a high public profile as it pursues multiple strategic initiatives simultaneously.

Why this matters to partners and clients of Saga

The NUPRC-UNIBEN partnership adds an institutional dimension to monitor, as academic collaborations of this kind can shape future local content expectations and technical qualification standards that would affect Norwegian service company market entry strategies. Norwegian companies mapping likely bidders across shallow-water and deepwater block categories should factor in the regulator's active capacity-building agenda when assessing partner and local content requirements. No procurement activity is expected until block awards are made, but the consolidating regulatory footprint warrants continued active monitoring.

PARTNER ANGLES

- **Deepwater drilling and subsea contractors:** Nine deepwater blocks in the round represent potential future demand for deepwater drilling, subsea installation, and inspection services; early engagement with likely bidders is advisable ahead of any awards.
- **Shallow-water and jackup drilling operators:** Fourteen shallow-water blocks historically linked to fixed platforms and jackup programmes represent a near-term service market for companies with regional shallow-water track records.
- **Training and competency development providers:** NUPRC's partnership with UNIBEN signals appetite for structured petroleum research and training collaboration, potentially opening doors for Norwegian technical training and competency service providers to engage with the regulator or affiliated institutions.

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