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Eni begins Coral North FLNG drilling with Saipem 12000, targets 2028 startup

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Eni and its Area 4 partners have moved from planning to execution, launching the drilling and completion campaign for the Coral North floating liquefied natural gas project offshore Mozambique. World Oil Africa confirmed on 4 November 2026 that the campaign is now underway using the Saipem 12000 drillship, with the programme expected to run for approximately ten months and the project targeting a 2028 startup. This follows Offshore Engineer's confirmation of the campaign start on 3 November, corroborating earlier reporting from October 2026 across Zacks Investment Research, Yahoo Finance, and The Globe and Mail, which had flagged a November commencement for up to six development wells required to supply gas to the Coral North platform.

The identification of the Saipem 12000 as the campaign drillship adds a concrete operational detail to what had previously been confirmed only as an active programme. A ten-month drilling schedule frames the timeline clearly: well delivery would be expected around September 2026, positioning hook-up, commissioning, mooring, and topsides integration activities to follow in sequence ahead of the 2028 first-gas target. Six development wells in a deepwater FLNG setting represent a substantial programme involving subsea wellhead systems, drilling riser equipment, well completion packages, and offshore support vessel activity — supply chains that are now actively engaged.

Coral North is the second FLNG unit in Eni's Area 4 development sequence, following Coral Sul, which became Africa's first deepwater FLNG facility when it delivered its inaugural LNG cargo in 2022. Eni is simultaneously evaluating the potential for a third FLNG vessel in the Rovuma Basin, a concept that would represent one of the largest integrated deepwater-to-LNG developments on the African continent if sanctioned. No final investment decision, contract award, or block designation for a third unit has been announced, and that workstream remains under evaluation rather than a committed project. The successful execution of the Coral North drilling campaign, now underway with a defined vessel and schedule, will be a key datapoint informing any future FID on a third vessel.

Eni's floating offshore model continues to demonstrate resilience where the onshore alternative has stalled. TotalEnergies' Mozambique LNG project at Afungi remains suspended following a 2021 force majeure declaration linked to the Cabo Delgado insurgency, while the Coral series has advanced steadily through sanction, construction, first cargo, and now into an active second drilling campaign with a named drillship and a defined production horizon. The confirmed 2028 startup target reinforces the offshore FLNG model as Mozambique's practical near-term LNG delivery mechanism and signals that a second wave of capital expenditure into the Rovuma Basin is already underway.

With the Saipem 12000 on location and a ten-month campaign clock running, the procurement and contracting window for the Coral North drilling phase is fully open. As the campaign progresses toward completion, attention will shift to hook-up, commissioning, mooring system work, and topsides integration — activities that follow well delivery and represent the next layer of service opportunity in the lead-up to the 2028 startup.

Why this matters to partners and clients of Saga

The identification of the Saipem 12000 and a ten-month campaign duration gives Norwegian drilling and well-services companies a defined schedule against which to align supply chain engagement with Eni's Area 4 project teams — the window is open now. Norwegian subsea and marine contractors with FLNG hook-up, commissioning, and mooring expertise should be mapping their positioning for the phase following well delivery, expected around Q3 2027 ahead of the 2028 startup. The third FLNG evaluation remains a watch item, but live campaign execution with a concrete timeline provides the strongest near-term business development entry point in the Rovuma Basin.



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- **Drilling and well-services contractors:** Saipem 12000 is the primary drillship, but a ten-month, six-well deepwater campaign creates demand for subsea wellhead systems, drilling risers, completion packages, and well intervention support where Norwegian specialists can engage as tier-two or tier-three suppliers.
- **Subsea equipment and umbilicals suppliers:** Six deepwater development wells require subsea production systems, flowlines, and control umbilicals; the active campaign timeline makes this an immediate procurement engagement rather than a future watch item.
- **FLNG hook-up and commissioning contractors:** With well delivery expected around Q3 2027, the hook-up, mooring, and topsides commissioning phase for the Coral North hull will follow closely, representing the next discrete procurement trigger ahead of the 2028 startup target.
- **Offshore support vessel operators:** A ten-month deepwater drilling campaign in the Rovuma Basin sustains continuous demand for anchor-handling, construction support, and dive-support vessels throughout 2027.

Original source: Offshore Engineer →

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