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Shell signs Gabon ultra-deepwater MoU, 15 blocks

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Shell has signed a memorandum of understanding with Gabon's Ministry of Oil and Gas covering ultra-deepwater offshore exploration across fifteen blocks, marking a formal return by the major to the West African producer. The agreement was concluded in Libreville on 24 June 2026 between Minister Clotaire Kondja and Shell's Head of Exploration, Thomas Praeger. This is an MoU — a statement of intent — not a block award or exploration licence. Substantive commitments will require further negotiation and regulatory steps before acreage is formally allocated.

Gabon frames the agreement as a strategic realignment rather than a routine commercial arrangement. The minister's office described Shell's re-engagement as consistent with a broader presidential vision for deepwater hydrocarbon development, signalling that the government is actively courting major operators to move the country's exploration frontier into ultra-deepwater territory. Gabon has a well-documented history with Shell in its conventional offshore and onshore portfolio, but ultra-deepwater acreage represents a materially different technical and capital challenge, one that typically demands specialised subsea infrastructure, high-specification drilling units, and long-cycle development timelines measured in years rather than months.

The fifteen-block scope is notably large for a single MoU. If Shell proceeds through formal licensing and into exploration drilling, the programme would require a substantial supply chain across well engineering, subsea installation, marine logistics, and potentially floating production infrastructure. Ultra-deepwater West African campaigns — comparable in technical profile to established programmes

elsewhere on the continent's Atlantic margin — have historically been among the most equipment- and service-intensive projects in the global offshore sector. The scale of the acreage package suggests that, should this MoU convert into awarded blocks and eventually an exploration campaign, procurement demand across multiple service segments could be considerable.

For now, the instrument is an MoU. Norwegian service companies should treat this as an early-stage signal requiring monitoring and relationship-building rather than active procurement outreach. The priority in the near term is tracking whether Gabon's hydrocarbons regulator formalises a licensing round or direct negotiation process for these ultra-deepwater blocks, and whether Shell moves to appoint technical partners or co-venturers. The window between MoU and exploration contract can extend from months to years, but establishing visibility with Shell's exploration and supply-chain teams now — particularly for companies with proven ultra-deepwater credentials on the Atlantic margin — positions Norwegian firms advantageously ahead of any formal tender process.

Why this matters to partners and clients of Saga

This MoU is a pre-commercial instrument; Norwegian service companies should monitor progress toward formal block awards and track whether Shell initiates a co-venturer or technical partner process for the ultra-deepwater programme. Relationship-building with Shell's exploration and procurement functions is appropriate now, but procurement outreach is premature until licences are awarded and a work programme is committed. Saga should flag this for quarterly review and maintain contact with Shell's African exploration desk.

PARTNER ANGLES

- **Drilling:** Ultra-deepwater exploration across fifteen blocks will require high-specification sixth- or seventh-generation drillships; Norwegian drilling contractors and rig managers should monitor Shell's well planning timeline and position early.
- **Subsea/FPSO:** If exploration yields commercial discoveries, ultra-deepwater development off Gabon would demand subsea trees, manifolds, and likely a leased

FPSO — Norwegian subsea integrators and FPSO owners should track the programme from MoU through to any FID announcement.

- **Service:** Well services companies with ultra-deepwater Atlantic margin experience — cementing, logging, completion — should establish or reinforce their Shell Gabon relationships now, ahead of any exploration drilling campaign.
- **Pipeline:** Subsea tie-back and infield pipeline engineering will be relevant if multiple blocks are developed as a hub; Norwegian pipeline engineering firms should watch for any FEED or concept-select announcements following formal block awards.

[Original source: AGP - Agence Gabonaise de Presse - Pétrole \(Gabon\) →](#)

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