

BIZTALKS · OIL & GAS | EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE · OCTOBER 2026 | NORTH SEA 2026–2030

One Basin, Two Trajectories

Why North Sea COOs need one executable asset plan.

The UK and Norwegian North Sea are entering 2026–2030 from different positions, but their COOs face the same operating-model problem: too many independently rational plans competing for the same finite asset windows, crews, vessels, permits, infrastructure and attention. The next productivity step is not another layer of visibility. It is one constraint-aware plan, backed by explicit cross-functional decision rights.

Two operating contexts, one management discipline: whether managing late-life integration in the UK North Sea or concurrent value capture in Norway, different basin trajectories converge on the need for one constraint-valid plan governed by one accountable arbiter. [1][2][7][10]

A. At a glance

The evidence framing the 2026–2030 operating decision

Different basin trajectories create different operational priorities, but both require the same management discipline: one constraint-valid plan with explicit cross-functional decision rights [1].

1.1m boe/day

(76% production efficiency)

Broadly steady UK Continental Shelf (UKCS) production in 2025, underpinned by a 76% production efficiency benchmark as operators balance output preservation against late-life maintenance and integrity workloads [3].

£43.4 billion

(£2.6bn spent in 2025)

Estimated remaining UKCS decommissioning cost. Although UK operators spent a record £2.6 billion on decommissioning in 2025, the remaining liability fell only marginally as inflation, uncertainty and competition for specialist resources offset efficiency gains [4].

97 producing fields

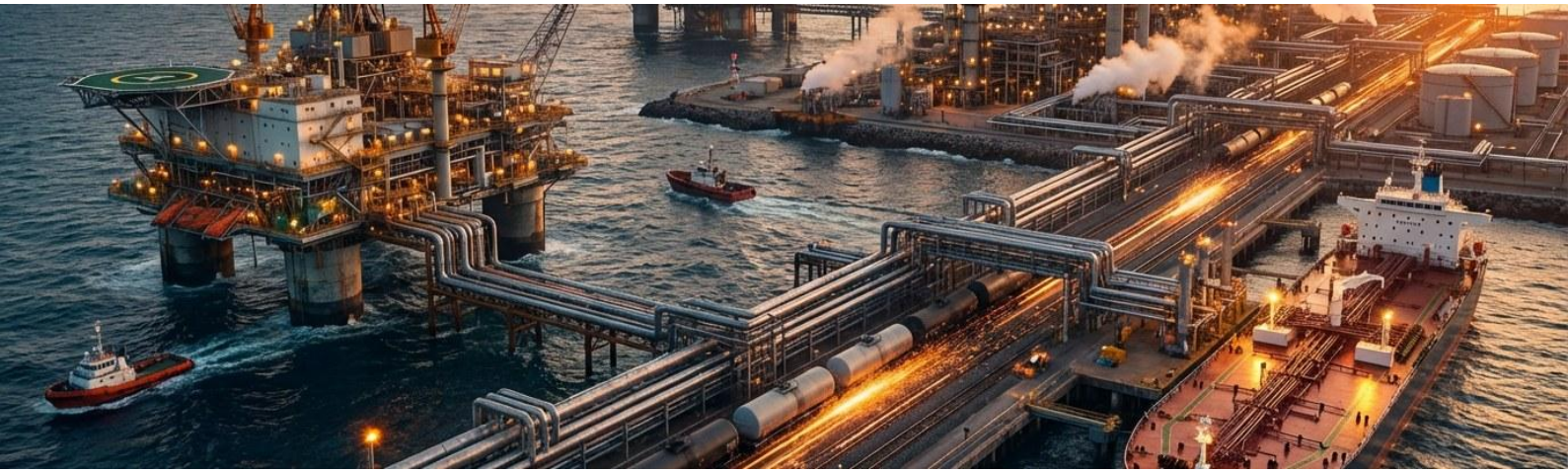
(~239m Sm³ oe produced)

Active producing fields on the Norwegian Continental Shelf (NCS; 69 in the North Sea) at end-2025, delivering roughly 239 million Sm³ oil equivalent alongside approximately NOK 243 billion in 2025 petroleum investment [7][8].

90+ discoveries &

~145 IOR projects

Norwegian discoveries awaiting development decisions alongside approximately 145 improved-recovery projects representing an estimated 280 million Sm³ oil equivalent, requiring tight orchestration across existing host facilities before post-2030 production decline [9][10].



B. What the evidence says

Two contexts: the difference changes the value function and binding constraints, not the need for one plan

1. UK North Sea: Late-life integration

The UK portfolio is no longer managed as a simple production system. It is a producing, maintaining, decommissioning and transitioning system at the same time. The North Sea Transition Authority (NSTA) projects 3.3 billion boe of production between 2026 and 2050 and more than £58 billion of exploration and production expenditure in 2026–2030, even as output declines over the longer term [2]. Government policy will manage existing fields through their lifetimes, cease new exploration licences and use Transitional Energy Certificates for tightly defined adjacent opportunities [5].

That creates a COO agenda dominated by sequencing. Maintenance needed to preserve availability must share scarce capacity with well abandonment, platform and subsea removal, brownfield modification, tie-backs, emissions work and preparation for reuse or repurposing. In 2025, UK operators spent a record £2.6 billion on decommissioning, but the remaining estimate fell only marginally to £43.4 billion as inflation, uncertainty and competition for specialist resources offset efficiency gains [4]. Fiscal transition adds another planning variable: the permanent Oil and Gas Revenue Levy is designed to replace the Energy Profits Levy when it ends no later than 31 March 2030 [6].

The operating system therefore has to protect current production without allowing near-term output targets to displace statutory integrity, decommissioning or environmental obligations. A portfolio can improve individual schedules and still destroy value if mobilisations, isolations, vessels, competent crews and shutdown windows are committed independently.

2. Norwegian North Sea: Concurrent value capture

Norway enters the period with a different portfolio profile. At the end of 2025, 97 fields were producing across the Norwegian Continental Shelf (69 in the North Sea); petroleum investment was approximately NOK 243 billion, and official forecasts put investment excluding exploration at NOK 230 billion in 2026 and NOK 212 billion in 2027 [7][8]. Much of the opportunity sits around existing infrastructure: small discoveries, improved-recovery measures, new wells, modifications and subsea tie-backs whose economics depend on host capacity and timing.

The Norwegian Offshore Directorate reports more than 90 discoveries awaiting development decisions and about 145 specific improved-recovery projects representing an estimated 280 million Sm^3 oil equivalent. It warns that production may fall steeply after 2030 without larger discoveries, faster development and sustained technology and infrastructure investment [9][10].

A tie-back can extend the life of a host and spread fixed costs, but only if the host's processing capacity, shutdown windows, wells, export route, integrity envelope and modification programme remain aligned. Remote operation, integrated operations centres and digital twins can improve cost, safety and responsiveness, and the Directorate explicitly presents them as enablers of mature-field economics [10]. They do not, by themselves, decide which competing activity should proceed when the system cannot absorb all of them.



> This is not primarily a shortage of candidate work. It is a portfolio orchestration problem.

3. Common failure mode: Why separate functional plans collide



The UK emphasis is late-life integration: preserving economic production while accelerating safe decommissioning and managing transition work. The Norwegian emphasis is infrastructure-led value capture: coordinating recovery, tie-backs, projects and operational changes before capacity and field life disappear. The difference changes the value function and the binding constraints. It does not remove the need for one authoritative plan.

ISO 55001:2024 strengthens this argument by adding explicit requirements around asset-management decision-making and value [11]. The Synchronized Asset Management framework translates that management-system requirement into an operating model: nine domains, one rolling constraint-aware plan, and one management layer authorised to re-sequence across functional boundaries. It also makes an operational distinction between absolute constraints derived from law, licence, permits and safety obligations, and weighted factors such as value, cost, risk and non-binding emissions consequences [1].

That distinction matters in upstream operations. A contractual milestone can carry major economic weight, but it cannot be allowed to override a safety-critical requirement. Conversely, treating every preference as an absolute constraint produces an infeasible plan. The operating model must make the difference explicit and testable.

OPERATING DIMENSION

UK NORTH SEA	NORWEGIAN NORTH SEA
Protect Value Through Late Life	**Convert Opportunity Into Output**
Primary Portfolio Trajectory	
Late-life integration: 3.3bn boe projected output (2026–2050) and >£58bn E&P spend (2026–2030) alongside structural decline [2].	Concurrent value capture: 69 North Sea producing fields (97 across NCS; ~239m Sm^3 oe in 2025) and NOK 230bn–212bn annual capex (2026–2027) before post-2030 decline [7][8][9].
Competing Activity Set	
Production preservation, statutory integrity, well abandonment, platform/subsea decommissioning (£43.4bn remaining) and asset reuse [3][4].	90+ undeveloped discoveries, ~145 improved-recovery projects (~280m Sm^3 oe), subsea tie-backs, infill drilling and host modifications [9][10].
Policy & Fiscal Context	
Cessation of new exploration licences; Transitional Energy Certificates for adjacent tie-backs [5]; Oil and Gas Revenue Levy replacing EPL by March 2030 [6].	State-backed push for faster tie-back development, IOR execution, electrification and remote/integrated operations before host life expires [9][10].

Shared Operating Requirement

One rolling, constraint-aware asset plan governed by one accountable cross-functional arbiter under ISO 55001:2024 and Synchronized Asset Management [1][11].



Nine domains, one plan, one arbiter: How the domains relate to the plan

The Synchronized Asset Management framework groups upstream work by the role it plays in the plan [1]. Not every domain is an equal competitor for capacity: some select work, some contend for the asset, some gate execution, some bound the solution space and some close the performance loop. The plan makes collisions visible; the management layer has the authority to settle them.

Role in the Plan · Functional Principle · Upstream Domains and Governance Scope [1]

1 Bounds

Cannot be traded away (Absolute constraints)

HSSE and Emissions (where statutory permit limits bind). Derived from law, licence, safety cases and environmental permits; the planning system cannot trade these limits away.

2 Selects

What is worth doing (Portfolio intake)

Opportunity management. Evaluates candidate wells, tie-backs, modifications and interventions against asset value flow and strategic priorities.

3 Contends

Competes for the same finite asset window

Production, Maintenance and Projects. The three core activity engines whose schedules directly contend for shutdown windows, isolations, beds and processing capacity.

4 Gates

Governs physical execution capacity

Operations and Supply chain. Controls plant readiness, isolations, permits to work, offshore beds, specialist crews, vessels, rigs and long-lead materials.

5 Measures

Closes the value and performance loop

Operational accounting and Emissions (where quantified as weighted operational factors). Tracks realised value, deferred output, standby cost and carbon intensity.

6 Management Layer

Exercises cross-functional decision rights

One rolling, constraint-aware plan and one accountable arbiter authorised to re-sequence work across functional boundaries when constraints shift.

Synchronization is an authority model supported by data, not a dashboard beside the operation. [1]

C. Implications and scenarios

Three operating-model outcomes for 2026–2030

Between 2026 and 2030, three qualitative operating-model outcomes are plausible across North Sea portfolios. This progression represents a qualitative management synthesis from the Synchronized Asset Management framework and must be validated asset by asset in each operating context [1].

1

Fragmented optimisation

Functions retain their own plans and meet in coordination forums. Dashboards improve awareness, but conflicts still surface after commitments have been made. The visible symptoms are schedule churn, standby, premature mobilisation, late scope, deferred production and repeated escalation.

→

2

Integrated visibility without authority

The organisation builds a common data layer or integrated activity-planning tool, but decision rights remain distributed through functional hierarchies. This is useful monitoring, not synchronized management: the system can display the collision but cannot settle it.

→

3

Target state

Synchronized execution

Production, operations, maintenance, supply chain, projects, HSSE, emissions, operational accounting and opportunity management write to one plan. Work is released when enabling conditions are ready; obligation-derived limits bind the plan; and a named management layer resolves competition for finite capacity against documented criteria [1].



For UK assets, the first proof point should be an asset or hub where production, integrity work and decommissioning share vessels, wells, isolations or specialist crews. For Norwegian assets, it should be a host with concurrent recovery, tie-back, drilling, modification and electrification demand. In both cases, the test is behavioural: when the first contested decision arrives, does the agreed arbiter re-sequence the work, and do the functions accept the decision?

D. NTT DATA point of view

Operating-model discipline and digital enablement, designed together in the right order

North Sea operators do not need to choose between operating-model discipline and digital enablement. They need the two to be designed together, in the right order. NTT DATA proposes a joint operating and digital architecture combining AnyPlan3D's upstream management framework with NTT DATA's engineering, integration and adoption capabilities [1][12][13].

AnyPlan3D contributes the Synchronized Asset Management framework and specialist upstream operating-model knowledge: the decision architecture, nine-domain model, planning logic, obligation treatment and cross-functional management layer [1]. NTT DATA contributes Oil & Gas consulting, digital transformation, data and digital engineering, implementation, governance and organizational adoption.

NTT DATA's public work supports the enabling layer. Its published Intelligent Remote Operations Center (IROC) experience includes integrating field, logistics and production data, applying analytics to production constraints, and enabling role-based coordinated decisions [12]. Its Operation Anywhere proposition includes operating-model and workforce transformation alongside OT/IT/data integration and control-centre design [13]. These capabilities matter because synchronization must live in daily work, systems and authority, not in a conceptual model beside the operation.

AnyPlan3D

(Management System) [1]

Nine-domain Synchronized Asset Management model (SAM-CE-001), distinction between obligation-derived bounds and weighted value factors, readiness-at-release rules and cross-functional arbitration rights [1].

NTT DATA

(Digital & Adoption Layer) [12][13]

Basin-scale IROC integration of field, logistics and production data [12]; Operation Anywhere control-centre design, OT/IT/data convergence and role-based workforce adoption [13].



The joint proposition starts with the management system, not a technology selection. Then configure the data, planning, workflow, integration and adoption layers needed to make those choices executable and auditable.

DEPLOYMENT SEQUENCE (Joint Architecture)

1. Define value flow
2. Map constrained resources
3. Set synchronization boundary
4. Encode obligation bounds
5. Establish arbiter decision rights and configure digital workflows.

Management system first; enabling technology second; measurable adoption throughout.

E. What leaders should do

Six actions that turn the model into an operating decision

01

Name the value flow and the true constraints

State what the asset exists to deliver, then identify the resources that actually limit it by horizon: shutdown windows, permits, beds, wells, vessels, competent crews, processing capacity or export infrastructure.

02

Choose one contested asset, not an easy pilot

Prove the model where at least three domains genuinely compete for the same capacity. A pilot without conflict cannot demonstrate arbitration.

03

Give the management layer real authority

Define who may re-sequence work, against which criteria, at what cadence, and which decisions must escalate. A common plan without this authority remains a reporting artefact.

04

Represent obligations as bounds

Trace safety, integrity, licence, permit and environmental limits to their source and ensure the planning system cannot trade them away [1].

05

Bring contractors and projects inside the planning boundary

Exchange resource demand by period, enabling conditions, dependencies and configuration changes before mobilisation; milestones alone cannot expose a collision.

06

Measure synchronization, not meeting volume

Track readiness at release, re-plan latency, schedule stability, constrained-resource utilisation, deferred value, standby and the cost of poor synchronization.

Questions for the boardroom

Three boardroom questions test whether an upstream portfolio is governed for synchronized execution:

01

Value-destroying collisions

Which recurring conflict consumes the most value because it is discovered too late?

02

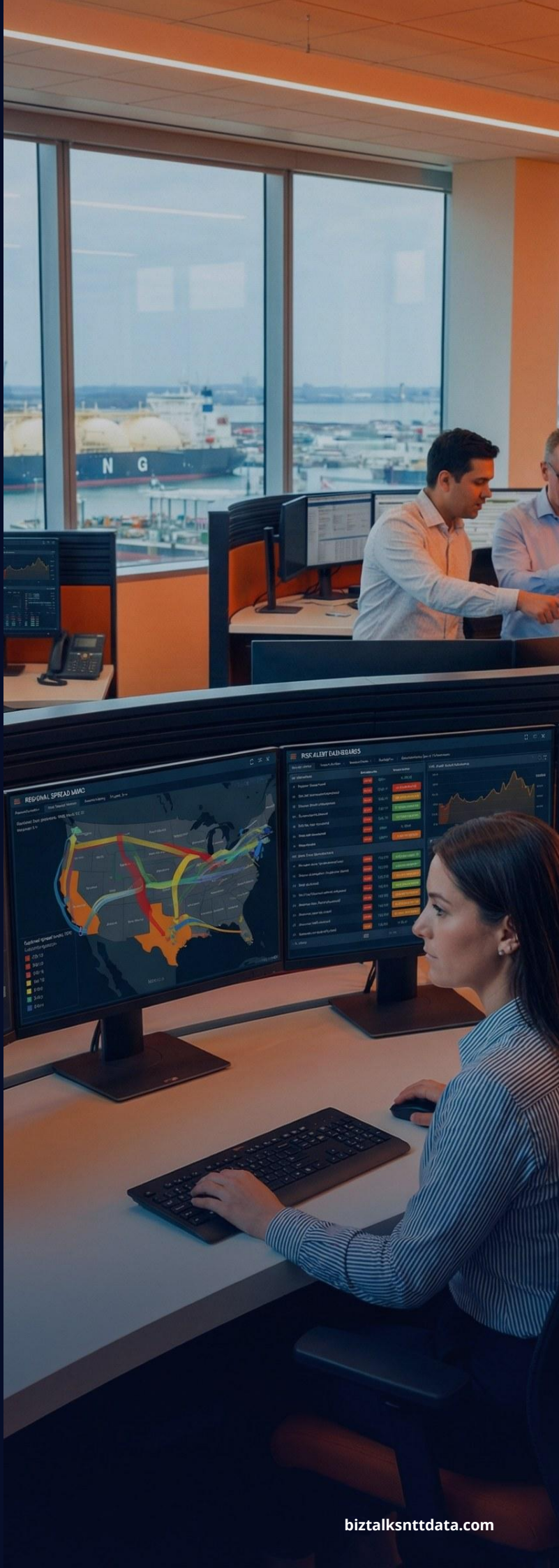
Cross-functional arbitration

Who currently has the authority to resolve a production–maintenance–project collision across functions?

03

Enforced statutory bounds

Which obligation-derived constraints are enforced by the plan itself rather than by individual vigilance?



In the UK, synchronization protects value while the basin manages decline, decommissioning and transition. In Norway, it protects the host capacity and execution windows needed to turn a dense opportunity set into production. In both, the advantage is the same: shortening the distance between a changed constraint and a valid decision.

The North Sea comparison is not an argument for identical priorities; it is an argument for a common discipline. The operating test: identify one contested asset and verify whether the organisation can produce one constraint-valid plan with one accountable arbiter.

Research cut-off: 2 October 2026

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