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NUMERICAL MODELLING OF PIPELINE CONSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

During the construction of pipelines, the girth welds, which join pipe sections, are placed under various stresses. The stresses are due to mechanical handling loads such as those that occur when lifting the front end of the pipeline to place it on supports as well as thermal stresses due to the welding thermal cycle. These stresses, combined with the presence of hydrogen from cellulosic electrodes, can produce hydrogen assisted cold cracking (HACC) in the root pass of pipeline girth welds. HACC can cause catastrophic failure of a pipeline girth weld. By reducing the residual stress and hydrogen concentration experienced in a pipeline girth weld, the risk of HACC is also reduced. The method used in this study to reduce the residual stress and hydrogen concentration is modification of the construction procedure.

A numerical model of the pipeline construction process has been created. After surveying the literature this appears to be the first model capable of modelling the process in a transient sense. This is extremely useful as the residual stress and hydrogen diffusion is not only dependant on the application of process parameters but also their timing.

In order to validate the modelling scheme developed, an experiment was conducted using the 'Blind Hole Drilling' strain gauge method of residual stress measurement. There was sufficient agreement between numerical and experimental results to indicate that the numerical modelling procedure was capable of conducting a study of pipeline construction.

The use of cellulosic electrodes for the welding of pipelines in Australia is preferred. Such electrodes possess certain favourable running characteristics suited to pipeline construction but unfortunately produce a very large amount of diffusible hydrogen, leading to saturation of the weld metal. The diffusion of hydrogen has been modelled using a scheme based on Fick's Second Law of Diffusion. The parameters reported to dominate the rate of diffusion are the timing of the weldment passes, the joint geometry, pre-heating and post-heating, all of which have been investigated in this thesis.

This study has highlighted the influence of process parameters on the resulting residual stress and hydrogen diffusion. By analysing the pipeline construction process in a transient sense, an understanding of the transient risk of HACC has been developed. This has enabled recommendations regarding procedural changes to be made to the pipeline industry.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
NOTATION	v
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF TABLES	xx
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 OBJECTIVE	4
1.2 SCOPE	4
CHAPTER 2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW	6
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	6
2.1.1 Occurrence of Hydrogen Cracking in Girth Welds	7
2.1.2 Factors Influencing Transient and Residual Stress.....	9
2.1.3 Overview of Thesis.....	12
2.2 MECHANICAL HANDLING LOADS.....	15
2.2.1 Pipeline Construction Process	15
2.2.1.1 Welding Process	16

2.2.1.2	Timing of Events	19
2.2.2	Stress Due to Lifting Pipeline Front End.....	22
2.2.3	Experimental Analysis of Lifting Stress.....	27
2.2.4	Ovality Stress.....	30
2.2.5	Summary.....	32
2.3	RESIDUAL STRESS	34
2.3.1	Analytical Residual Stress Models	36
2.3.2	Numerical Residual Stress Models.....	42
2.3.3	Thermal Modelling.....	43
2.3.3.1	Heat Flow Equations	44
2.3.3.2	Heat Sources	47
2.3.3.3	Summary	51
2.3.4	Thermal Stress Modelling of Welding	52
2.3.4.1	Transformation Plasticity	53
2.3.4.2	Axisymmetric Models	56
2.3.4.3	3D Models	59
2.3.4.4	Multiple Passes	62
2.3.5	Effect of Process Parameters	64
2.3.6	Methods of Stress Relief.....	66
2.4	HYDROGEN DIFFUSION MODELLING.....	70
2.5	GAPS IN CURRENT KNOWLEDGE	72
2.6	RESEARCH PROBLEM	74

2.7	JUSTIFICATION OF WORK	76
CHAPTER 3. CONSTRUCTION MODELLING.....		78
3.1	LIFTING MODELS.....	81
3.1.1	Nominal Dimensions	82
3.1.2	Simulation of Support Skids.....	83
3.1.3	Sub-modelling the Lifting Process	86
3.1.4	Calculation of Forces to Simulate Lifting	88
3.1.5	Verification of Sub-modelling Technique.....	92
3.1.6	Lifting Model Summary	96
3.2	THERMAL MODELS	98
3.2.1	Transient Solution.....	98
3.2.2	Boundary Conditions.....	99
3.2.3	Material Properties.....	100
3.2.4	Heat Source.....	102
3.2.5	Correction Factors	104
3.2.6	Axisymmetric Models	105
3.2.7	Results of Heat Transfer Analysis	105
3.2.8	Comparison of Axisymmetric and 3D Results	107
3.3	RESIDUAL STRESS.....	109
3.3.1	Formulation of Residual Stress Models.....	110
3.3.2	Material Properties.....	112

3.3.3	Results of Transient Stress Analysis.....	115
3.3.4	Experimental Validation	120
3.4	CONSTRUCTION MODELS	122
3.4.1	Simulation of Lifting During Construction	122
3.4.2	Simulation of Line-up Clamp	124
CHAPTER 4. EXPERIMENTAL VERIFICATION		128
4.1	METHODS AVAILABLE FOR EXPERIMENTAL VERIFICATION .	129
4.1.1	Non-Destructive Methods.....	129
4.1.2	Destructive Methods.....	130
4.1.3	Summary	137
4.2	BENCHMARK TEST.....	139
4.2.1	Experimental Equipment	139
4.2.2	Experimental Procedure.....	142
4.2.3	Results From Benchmark Test.....	144
4.2.4	Finite Element Model of Benchmark Test.....	145
4.2.5	Calibration of Data Reduction Coefficients	147
4.3	EXPERIMENTAL RESIDUAL STRESS MEASUREMENT	152
4.3.1	Results of Residual Stress Measurement.....	155
4.3.2	Localised Plasticity	157
4.4	NUMERICAL MODEL OF WELDING EXPERIMENT.....	161
4.5	SUMMARY	163

CHAPTER 5. CONSTRUCTION PARAMETERS	164
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	164
5.1.1 Region of Interest	165
5.2 INFLUENCE OF PARAMETERS ON RESIDUAL STRESS	167
5.2.1 Heat Input Comparison.....	168
5.2.2 Material Used.....	172
5.2.3 Pipe Wall Thickness to Diameter Ratio.....	174
5.2.4 Lifting Pipeline Front End.....	176
5.2.4.1 Height of Lift	177
5.2.4.2 Strength of Material	178
5.2.4.3 Timing of Lift	179
5.2.4.4 Proportion of Root Pass Completed	181
5.2.5 Effect of Welding Start / Stop Position	183
5.3 SUMMARY	186
CHAPTER 6. HYDROGEN DIFFUSION MODELLING	189
6.1 INTRODUCTION.....	189
6.2 MODELLING TECHNIQUE USED.....	191
6.3 NUMERICAL EXPERIMENT.....	197
6.4 RESULTS	198
6.5 CONCLUSION.....	204

CHAPTER 7. TRANSIENT HACC RISK.....	205
7.1 EVOLUTION OF STRESS, TEMPERATURE AND HYDROGEN	206
7.2 TRANSIENT HACC RISK	207
7.3 INFLUENCE OF HOT PASS ON THE RISK OF HACC.....	210
7.4 SUMMARY	212
CHAPTER 8. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	213
8.1 DISCUSSION	213
8.1.1 Pipeline Construction Modelling.....	214
8.1.2 Experimental Verification Issues.....	216
8.1.3 Residual Stress.....	218
8.1.4 Hydrogen Diffusion.....	220
8.1.5 Transient Risk of HACC	221
8.2 CONCLUSIONS.....	223
8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS TO PIPELINE INDUSTRY	227
8.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF WORK.....	229
8.5 FUTURE WORK.....	230
REFERENCES	231
APPENDICES	250

A	SIMULATION OF LINE-UP CLAMP	250
B	BLIND HOLE DRILLING EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS	254
C	STRAIN VERSES DEPTH	256
D	PUBLICATIONS ARISING FROM THIS THESIS.....	261