In Situ Stress and Overpressures of Brunei Darussalam

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This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Science, The University of Adelaide

June 2003
# Table of Contents

Abstract........................................................................................................................................v

Statement.......................................................................................................................................vii

Acknowledgments..........................................................................................................................viii

List of Symbols..............................................................................................................................ix

1. **Introduction**............................................................................................................................1
   1.1 Project Background..................................................................................................................1
   1.2 Project Aims...........................................................................................................................2
   1.3 Thesis Plan..............................................................................................................................3

2. **Geological Summary of Brunei Darussalam**.......................................................................5
   2.1 Introduction and Geological Setting......................................................................................5
   2.2 Southeast Asian Tectonic History..........................................................................................5
   2.3 Baram Delta Province Stratigraphic and Tectonic History.....................................................8
       2.3.1 Stratigraphy....................................................................................................................8
       2.3.2 Geomechanical Setting of the Baram Delta Province....................................................13
       2.3.3 Structures of the Deltaic Overburden............................................................................16
   2.4 Exploration History..............................................................................................................20

3. **Pore Pressure**.........................................................................................................................22
   3.1 Introduction............................................................................................................................22
       3.1.1 The Hydrostatic Pressure...............................................................................................22
   3.2 Pore Pressure Measurement Techniques.............................................................................23
       3.2.1 Transient Pressure Tests..............................................................................................23
       3.2.2 Pore Pressure Estimates from Mud Weight.................................................................24
   3.3 Overpressures in Brunei.........................................................................................................25
       3.3.1 Mud Volcanoes, Shale Diapirs and Shale Dykes...........................................................25
       3.3.2 Previous Work on Overpressure Distribution in Brunei.................................................29
       3.3.3 Regional Distribution of Overpressure...........................................................................30
       3.3.4 Field-Scale Distribution of Overpressure......................................................................34
   3.4 Discussion...............................................................................................................................36

4. **Log Analysis of Overpressure**.............................................................................................38
   4.1 Introduction.............................................................................................................................38
   4.2 Mechanisms for Overpressure Generation...........................................................................38
       4.2.1 Disequilibrium Compaction Mechanisms.......................................................................39
       4.2.2 Fluid Expansion Mechanisms.......................................................................................42
4.3 Origin of Overpressure in Brunei ................................................................. 45
  4.3.1 Potential Mechanisms of Overpressure Generation in Brunei ............... 46
  4.3.2 Porosity-Vertical Effective Stress Relationships ................................. 47
  4.3.3 Porosity-Vertical Effective Stress Relationships in Brunei .................... 48
  4.3.4 Discussion ............................................................................................. 52
4.4 Sonic and Density Log Response to Overpressure in Brunei ...................... 54
  4.4.1 Introduction ......................................................................................... 54
  4.4.2 Shale Porosity from the Density Log .................................................... 56
  4.4.3 Shale Porosity from the Sonic Log ....................................................... 57
  4.4.4 Shale Normal Compaction Curve ......................................................... 59
  4.4.5 Sonic and Density Log Response to Overpressure ............................... 61
  4.4.6 Discussion ............................................................................................. 62
4.5 Pore Pressure Prediction ............................................................................. 64
  4.5.1 The Eaton (1972) Method ................................................................... 64
  4.5.2 The Eaton (1972) Exponent .................................................................. 65
  4.5.3 Results of Pore Pressure Prediction ..................................................... 66
4.6 Conclusions ............................................................................................... 68
5. The Stress Tensor and Rock Failure .............................................................. 70
  5.1 Introduction ............................................................................................... 70
  5.2 The Stress Tensor ..................................................................................... 71
  5.3 Stresses and Rock Failure ......................................................................... 74
  5.4 Effect of Pore Pressure............................................................................. 78
  5.5 Pore Pressure-Stress Coupling ................................................................. 79
  5.6 Frictional Limits to Stress ........................................................................ 80
  5.7 Stresses Around Wellbores ...................................................................... 81
    5.7.1 Vertical Wellbores ................................................................................ 81
    5.7.2 Deviated Wellbores ............................................................................ 84
6. Vertical Stress Magnitude ............................................................................ 87
  6.1 Introduction ............................................................................................... 87
  6.2 Methodology ............................................................................................. 87
    6.2.1 Density Log Format ............................................................................. 88
    6.2.2 Removing Spurious Data from the Density Log ................................... 89
    6.2.3 Estimating the Average Density from the Surface to the Top of the Density Log........................................................................................... 90
  6.3 Results ....................................................................................................... 94
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Origin of the Variation in Vertical Stress</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Implications for Pore Pressure Prediction</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 Conclusions</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Horizontal Stress Orientation</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Introduction</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Determination of Horizontal Stress Orientation</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 Results</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 Tectonic Implications</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.1 Origin of the Outer Shelf Stress Field</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.2 Origin of the Inner Shelf Stress Field</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.3 Maximum Horizontal Stress Rotation in Brunei</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.4 ‘Prograding Deltaic Tectonics’: A Regional Interpretation of the Structural Evolution of the Baram Delta Province</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 Conclusions</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Minimum Horizontal Stress Magnitude</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1 Introduction</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2 Determining the Minimum Horizontal Stress Magnitude</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3 Minimum Horizontal Stress Magnitude in Normally Pressured Sequences</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4 Pore Pressure-Stress Coupling in Brunei</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4.1 Pore Pressure Stress Coupling</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4.2 Pore Pressure-Stress Coupling Relationship in Brunei</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4.3 Implications of Pore Pressure-Stress Coupling: Champion Blowout Fractures</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4.4 Implications of Pore Pressure-Stress Coupling: Formation of Shale Dykes</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5 Speculation on the State of Stress in the Delta Toe</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5.1 The State of Stress in the Delta Toe</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5.2 Geomechanical Implications</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6 Conclusions</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Maximum Horizontal Stress Magnitude</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1 Introduction</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2 Determining the Maximum Horizontal Stress Magnitude</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2.1 Introduction</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2.2 Frictional Limit to Stress</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2.3 Forward Modelling of Breakout Occurrence in Deviated Boreholes</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2.4 Forward Modelling of Leak-Off Pressure Variation in Deviated Boreholes</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3 Summary of Maximum Horizontal Stress Magnitude Results</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.4 The Complete Stress Tensor: Implications .............................................. 146

9.4.1 Tectonic Implications .............................................................................. 146

9.4.2 Implications for Wellbore Stability ................................................................ 147

9.4.3 Implications for Tensile Failure of the Borehole Wall and Fracture Stimulation ........................................................................................................ 149

9.4.4 Implications for Seal Breach by Fault Reactivation ........................................ 150

9.5 Conclusions ........................................................................................................ 154

10. Concluding Statement ....................................................................................... 155

Appendix A: Brunei Darussalam Pore Pressure Database ........................................ 156

Appendix B: Horizontal Stress Orientation Data .................................................... 201

Appendix C: Results of Leak-off and Minifracture Tests ........................................ 209

Appendix D: Published Paper on Pore Pressure-Stress Coupling in Brunei ........ 213

Appendix E: Published Paper on Vertical Stress Magnitude in Brunei ................ 225

References .............................................................................................................. 253
Abstract

This thesis analyses in situ stress and overpressure throughout Brunei. The resultant in situ stress and pore pressure data is applied to establish the neotectonic evolution of the Baram Delta province and resolve a variety of current geomechanics issues affecting petroleum exploration and production in the region.

A database of pore pressure information was compiled for 157 wells in 61 fields throughout Brunei. Overpressures are observed in 54 fields in the underlying pro-delta shales and the inner shelf deltaic sequences. Porosity-vertical effective stress plots from 31 fields reveal that overpressures are primarily generated by disequilibrium compaction in the pro-delta shales but have been vertically transferred into the inner shelf deltaic sequences. Sediments overpressured by disequilibrium compaction exhibit different physical properties to those overpressured by vertical transfer and hence, different pore pressure prediction strategies are required depending on the overpressure generation mechanism. Sonic and density log data detects overpressures generated by disequilibrium compaction and pore pressures are accurately predicted using an Eaton exponent of 3.0. Sonic log data detects vertically transferred overpressures, even in the absence of a porosity anomaly, and pore pressures are reasonably predicted using an Eaton exponent of 6.5.

The present-day stress tensor in Brunei displays a range of unique characteristics as a direct result of the tectonic setting of the Baram Delta province. The area exhibits the greatest variation in vertical (overburden) stress gradient ever described. The vertical stress gradients in 24 fields vary from 18.3 to 24.3 MPa/km in the hinterland at 1500 m depth. This vertical stress variation represents a variation in bulk density across the delta of 2.07-2.48 g/cm³ in the top 1500 m of sediment. Breakouts and drilling-induced tensile fractures observed in 19 wells indicate that the maximum horizontal stress is oriented margin-normal (NW-SE) in the proximal parts of the basin and margin-parallel (NE-SW) in the distal region. The margin-normal maximum horizontal stress direction is perpendicular to the strike of Miocene-Pliocene normal growth faults in the delta. Hence, there has been an approximately 90° rotation of the maximum horizontal stress direction over time in
the inner shelf. The present-day and temporal stress rotations and the variation in vertical stress yield a ‘snapshot’ of a delta that is inverting and self-cannibalising. The proximity of the northwest Borneo active margin has resulted in uplift of the hinterland and successive inversion of normal-faults in a basin-ward direction, reflected in the present-day by the high vertical stress magnitudes and the margin-normal maximum horizontal stress in the inner shelf. The region of deltaic growth faulting is also ‘prograding’ as demonstrated by the margin-parallel maximum horizontal stress direction and active growth faulting in the outer shelf.

The minimum horizontal stress gradients in normally pressured sequences in 18 fields vary from 13.8 MPa/km in the Late Miocene-Quaternary Baram Delta system up to 17.0 MPa/km in the Middle-Late Miocene Champion Delta system. The higher minimum horizontal stress magnitudes are the result of a greater degree of basal attachment in the Champion Delta system. The minimum horizontal stress magnitude increases in overpressured sequences and decreases in depleted sequences with a pore pressure-stress coupling ratio \(\Delta \sigma_{hmin}/\Delta P_p\) of 0.58. Pore pressure-stress coupling results in the likely mode of overpressure-induced rock failure being tensile failure oriented NW-SE (rather than reactivation of existing faults) in the inner shelf.

The maximum horizontal stress magnitude determined in four fields reveals that a normal faulting stress regime \(\sigma_v > \sigma_{hmax} > \sigma_{hmin}\) exists in normally pressure sequences of the Baram Delta province and hence the region is currently tectonically ‘relaxed’. The full stress tensor is applied to resolve several petroleum geomechanics issues in the Baram Delta province. Planned underbalanced and shallow wellbores are more mechanically stable, with respect to compressional and tensile failure, if deviated towards the minimum horizontal stress direction. However, proposed fracture stimulation in mature fields can be more easily undertaken in boreholes deviated towards the maximum horizontal stress direction. Current exploration prospects in the western outer shelf region are typically bounded by growth faults. However, the bounding-faults are optimally oriented for reactivation and hence, fault seal breach is a significant exploration risk in the western outer shelf region.