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Production Monitoring of Multilateral Wells by Quantum Marker Systems

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Abstract

Reliable information about the inflow composition and distribution in a multilateral well is of great importance and an existing challenge in the oil and gas industry. In this paper, we present an innovative method for dynamic monitoring of inflow profile based on quantum marker technology in a multi-lateral well located in West Siberia.

Marker systems were placed in the well during the well reconstruction by horizontal side tracking with the parent borehole remaining in production. This way of reconstruction allows development of the reservoir drainage area with a lateral hole and bringing the oil reserves from the parent borehole into production, which results in an increased flow rate and improved oil recovery rate. Placement of marker systems into parent borehole and side-track for fluid distribution monitoring allows to evaluate the flow rate from every borehole and estimate the effectiveness of performed well reconstruction.

Marker systems are placed into the parent borehole as a downhole sub installed into the well completion string. For the side-track polymer-coated marked proppant was injected during hydraulic fracturing to place markers.

The developed method was reliably used for an accurate and fast determination of the inflow distribution in a multi-lateral well which allows more efficient field development and also enabled us to provide effective solutions for following challenges:

1. Providing tools for timely water cut diagnostics in multilateral wells and information for water shut-off method selection;
2. Selecting the optimal well operating mode for effective field development and premature flooding prevention in one or both boreholes;
3. Evaluating whether well construction was performed efficiently, and an increased production rate was achieved;
4. Leading to a considerable economic savings in capital expenditure.

Introduction

Russia is estimated to hold the world's largest technically recoverable shale-oil resources. The conventional oil resource base is still very large, but there are doubts about how much is economically recoverable.

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In order to increase the effectiveness of shale-oil field development with reduced costs the industry pays more attention to advanced drilling and completion technologies, enhanced oil recovery methods and automatization techniques. The application of multilateral wells ensured higher drainage and reservoir productivity through the utilization of diverse configurations. Achieving higher productivity rates and maximizing the reach from a multilateral well has highly improved well performance compared to that of a conventional horizontal well under similar conditions. At the same time multilateral wells require more complex and more advanced technologies for optimal well construction, completion strategy and future interventions planning. The shift in focus is to have optimum reservoir surveillance to monitor and optimize well productivity.

Historically, the analysis of well production efficiency was based on geological and hydrodynamical modelling that considered petrophysical features, including porosity, permeability, mineralogy, and total organic carbon. However, logging operations to determine the inflow profile in production wells are a basis for making technical decisions to increase efficiency in field development and optimize well construction solutions or workover operations.

For the last few years there is a significant trend worldwide of using various tracer or marker based surveillance technologies to obtain data on the horizontal multilateral well's productivity. The main advantage of these technologies is the ability to obtain data over a long period of time with a significant decrease in the required resources, therefore providing new opportunities for horizontal and multilateral wells monitoring, reservoirs management and increasing the cumulative production.

Marker based production surveillance technologies involve the placement of quantum markers along the horizontal well or in each borehole of multilateral wells. When markers contact target formation fluid (oil, water, gas), the fluid captures the markers and move along with the flow. Fluid samples are taken from the wellhead and analysed to identify the number of markers of each code in each type of fluid. Data on the oil, gas and water inflow distribution over each interval or borehole are interpreted based on the laboratory test results.

Geological Data of the Field and Marker System Placement Description

The object of the paper is oil field situated in West Siberia. In terms of the reserves quantity, it can be called a super-giant oil field. The oil reserves in the field are mainly silt and sand deposits of the AS10, AS11, and AS12 horizons. The AS10 and AS12 horizons are identified as the main development targets within the field. The development of the field was considered uneconomic for a long time due to the extremely low permeability of the productive layers.

New technologies, in particular hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling opened up new opportunities for the oil production industry and made it possible not only to start the field development, but also to increase many-fold the production from 2.7 million tons of oil equivalent (o.e.) in 2005 to 12.5 million tons of o. e. in 2017. The initial recoverable reserves of the field in the ABC1+C2 category are about 469 million tons of oil. The initial oil in place exceeds 1,5 billion tons.

Table 1 shows the geological and engineering data on the target well of the field.

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Table 1—Geological and engineering data on the target well

Parameter	Value
Number of producing wells	1
Net pay, m	13
Reservoir pressure, atm	260
Reservoir temperature, °C	90
Number of hydraulic fracture zones, pcs	1 (out of 3)
Length of the horizontal lateral, m	361

A downhole marker system sleeve containing marked material was placed into the parent borehole. The marker coated proppant was injected in one stage into the sidetrack during the hydraulic fracturing. Fig. 1 shows the equipment placement diagram for the parent borehole and the sidetrack in the target well.

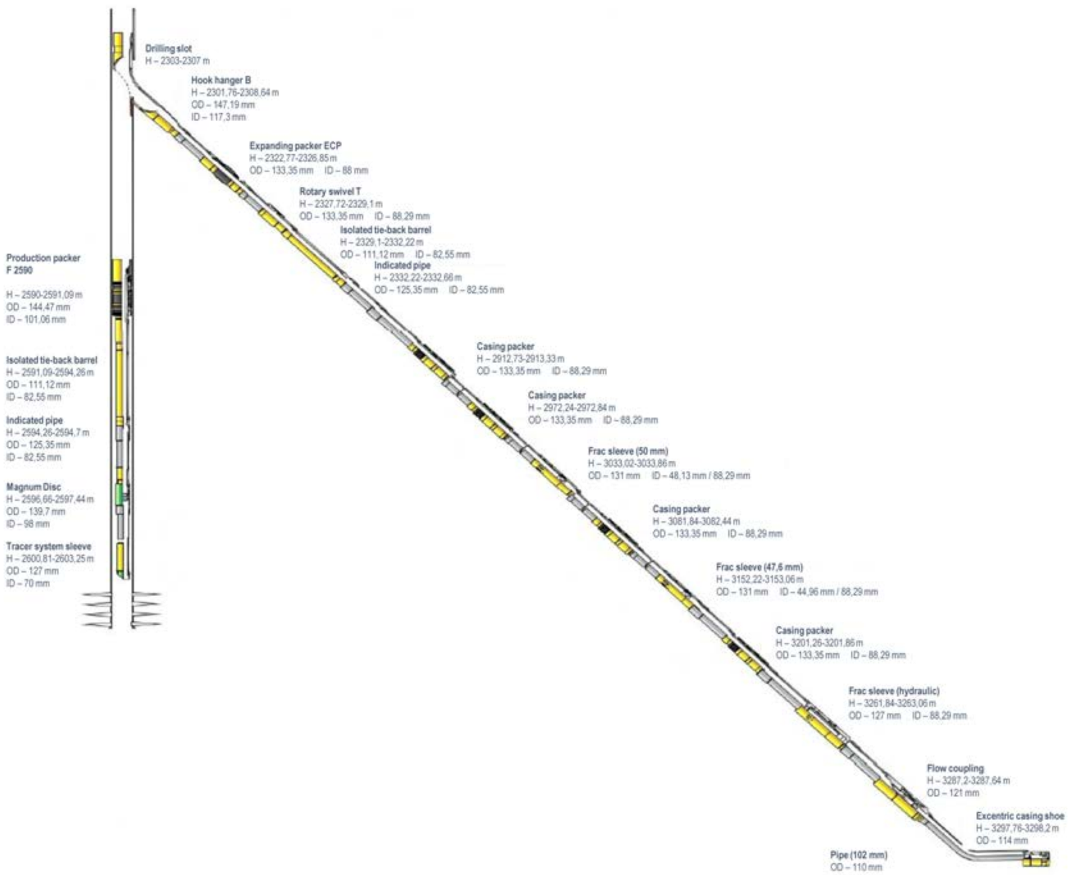

Figure 1—Equipment placement diagram for the parent borehole and the sidetrack

Fig. 2 shows the well sidetrack profile obtained through well logging during drilling, and the frac port layout.

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Figure 2—Target well sidetrack profile

During the hydraulic fracturing in the target well, 90 tons of proppant was injected, including 15 tons of tracer coated proppant. This quantity is required to ensure a sufficient tracer concentration in the fluid samples, to achieve a sufficient area covered by the tracer coated proppant released from the hydraulic fracture, and to ensure the required accuracy of the survey along with the surveillance duration.

Tracer-Based Well Production Profiling Technology

The core element of the technology described in this article are quantum dots that are fluorescent semiconductor nanocrystals [1, 6]. Quantum dots are perfectly suited for optical encoding due to their solid structure, broad absorption spectrum, and narrow emission spectrum. Due to high-quality quantum dots, the technology offers high accuracy and efficiency of survey. Quantum dots are not used separately, instead, they are encapsulated in the marker-reporters. Marker-reporters are polymer spherical particles containing various combinations of quantum dots (Fig. 3). Six types of quantum dots are used within a single polymer particle enabling creation of 63 unique signatures.

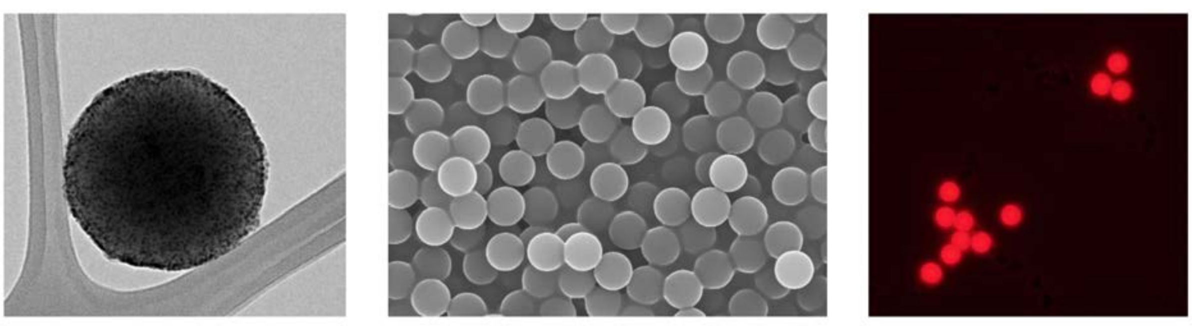

Figure 3—Microphotography of marker-reporters in transmission (a) and scanning (b) electron microscopes and microphotography in optical fluorescence microscopes (b)

A special polymer coating with quantum tracers can be applied to proppant or sand. Then, the tracer coated proppant is injected into the well in the course of multi-stage hydraulic fracturing, with a unique code placed in each stage. It is recommended to inject the tracer coated proppant as the last pack to enable maximum contact of the fluid with the marked polymer coating. During the subsequent long- term well operation, the markers are evenly released into the water or oil phases and arrive at the wellhead. After

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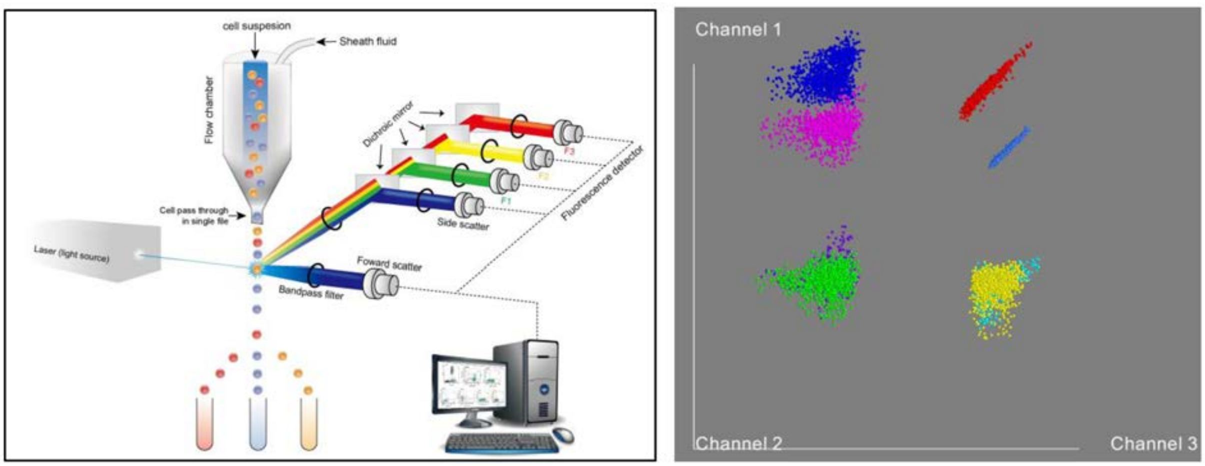
completing multi-stage hydraulic fracturing and injecting the tracer coated proppant, reservoir fluid samples are collected from time to time from the wellhead. These samples are then sent to the laboratory for further analysis.

A special sample preparation is required to identify the number of markers in the sample. It involves various physical and chemical methods and serves mainly for extracting the markers from the sample into deionised cleaned water. Both water and oil samples require preparation.

Flow cytofluorimetry is the main instrumental method for identifying and quantifying markers extracted from reservoir fluid samples. The basic principle of the cytofluorimeter operation can be briefly described as follows: due to the incompressible liquid, the marker dispersion flow is focused, then it enters the nozzle, where the markers line up strictly one after the other and are irradiated by lasers (Fig. 4a). The detectors placed opposite the lasers record the forward light scattering indicators, and the side detectors measure the intensity of the side light scattering and the intensity of the fluorescence, which is different for different marker-reporter codes.



(a) (b)

Figure 4—Principles of flow cytofluorimetry operation (a) and a sample of data obtained as a result of cytometric analysis (b)

The analysis of samples from multi-stage fracturing wells yields a large amount of data. For example, the identification information for each marker-reporter is a point in a 25-dimensional space. Therefore, manual processing of the data would be very challenging. Machine learning and neural networks used to analyse cytometry data enable detailed analysis with high accuracy in a short time frame. In addition, the possibility of errors due to the human factor is zero at this stage of the work.

Deployment of a Combined Proppant-Cassette Solution

The range of geological and engineering challenges that could be addressed by using tracer-based production profiling systems is wide, due to the availability of brand-new approaches to the placement of marker material downhole. The most suitable placement method is selected depending on the type of the work planned: drilling, stimulation or well workover. Based on this logic, there are three main approaches: tracer system integration in well completions, injection of tracer coated proppant during multi-stage hydraulic fracturing, as well as solid tracer injection into a liquid medium, for example, during selective acid stimulation (Fig. 5).

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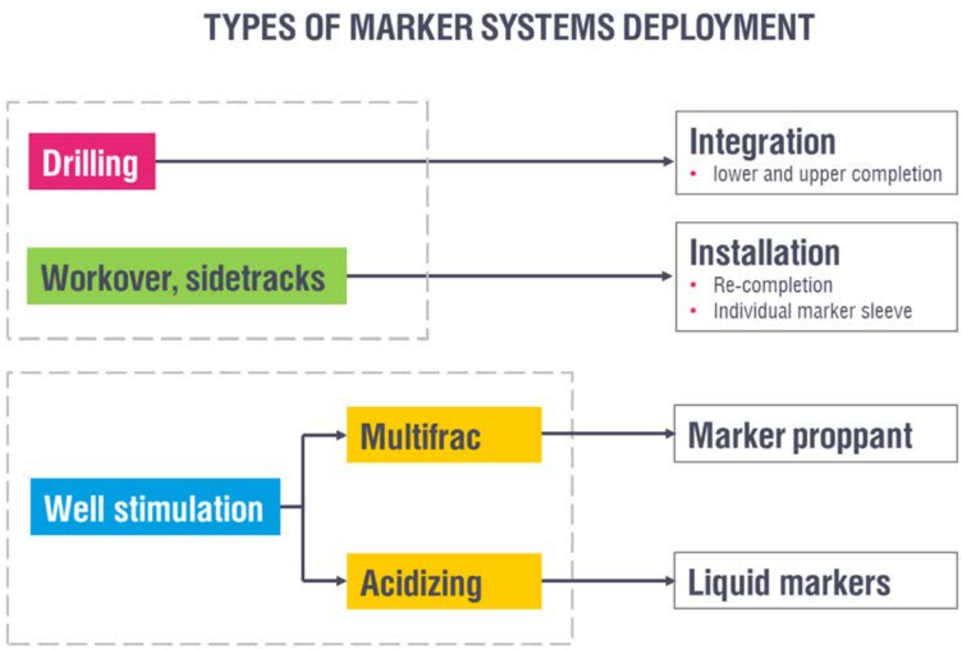

Figure 5—Methods of marker placement in the well

The placement of tracer systems in well completions is the most common application used both in drilling and for the existing well stock (Fig. 6). During drilling, depending on the completion design and type, the tracer material can be placed in the lower or upper completion by using slotted sleeves (Fig. 7), or by integrating the material into the completion equipment, such as flow control devices or well screens.

Figure 6—Placement of marker systems in the lower completion (a) and recompletion (b)

Figure 7—Cross-section view of the tracer sleeves (a) and tracer inserts (b)

The tracer systems are used in the existing well stock most commonly in cases of high water cut, when it is necessary to identify its causes and sources. Tracer systems are run in the existing wellbore, either integrated into the re-completion, or by individual packer and anchor equipment. These works are usually performed simultaneously with well workover to avoid the need for additional involvement of the workover crew and minimise the loss of well products recovery.

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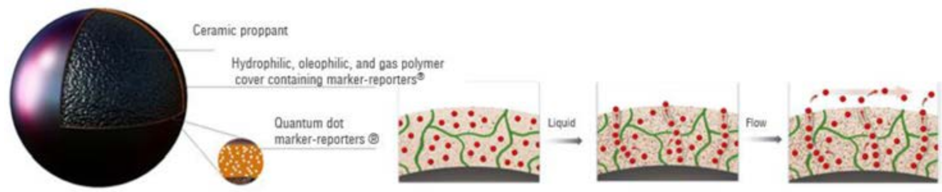
When planning various kinds of well stimulation operations, tracer-based production profiling systems can be placed by either using marked proppant during hydraulic fracturing operations or by injecting solid tracers in a liquid fluid systems (acid or fracturing fluid). The use of marked proppant is the most common solution since it enables long-term dynamic monitoring, reaching three years or more. The method consists in injecting the marked proppant having a unique code in the last pack into each of the frac stages to quantify the profile and composition of the flow. A distinctive feature of the marked proppant from the standard one is the presence of a surface polymer cover constituting a matrix incorporating quantum inflow tracers (Fig. 8a). In the process of operation, as the composite material swells in contact with the target reservoir fluid, diffusion channels are formed in the polymer layer, enabling the release of markers (Fig. 8b).



(a) (b)

Figure 8—The structure of the marked proppant (a) and the marker release process (b)

Completions of wells in which multi-stage hydraulic fracturing was performed can be equipped with marker sleeves, among other things. In this regard, there is a problem of choosing the most rational method for placing marker systems, which requires identifying the most reliable and economical way. The use of marked proppant does not require any changes in the completion design, while an additional cost advantage is achieved by using the marked proppant for injection instead of the standard ceramic one. If economically feasible, different placement methods can be combined, in the attempt to cross-reference the results and have independent self-validation methodology (Fig. 9).

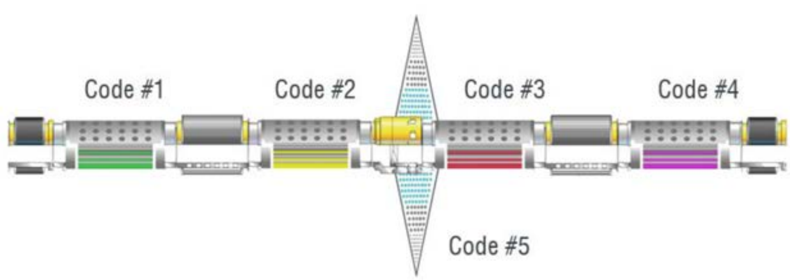


Figure 9—Combined solution for placing marker systems

The availability of various approaches to the placement of marker systems in wells described in this section opened up the possibilities to effectively address the problems of reservoir surveillance in the drainage area penetrated by the sidetrack and evaluating the remaining reserves recovery in the parent borehole in the drainage area.

In the sidetrack, in order to identify the flow rate and fluid composition and evaluate the effectiveness of sidetracking oparation, it was decided to use a marked during hydraulic fracturing. The monitoring of the remaining reserves in the parent borehole was enabled due to the quantum marker insert mounted on the packer (Fig. 10).

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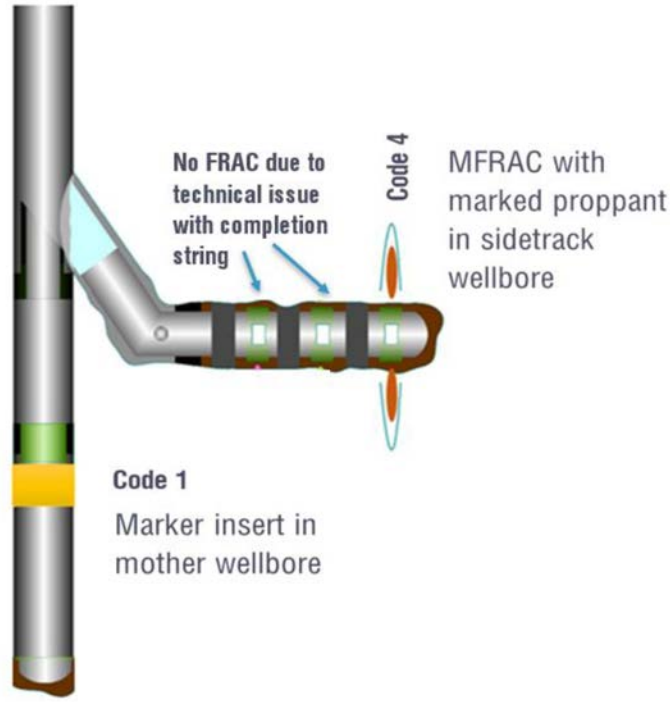

Figure 10—A combined solution at the well

Production Profiling Test with Combined Marker Solution

To assess the current state and perform long-term production profiling surveillance at the well, reservoir fluid samples were taken from the wellhead. Sampling was performed in several steps: first, immediately after commissioning in April 2020, then after a month of operation, and eventually six months later (March 2021), when the well came into the steady- state operation mode.

The analysis took into account historical data of the entire well production dynamics, (flow rate of total fluid, oil rate, water cut, bottom-hole pressure) over time. This kind of information helps track the production history and downhole pressure dynamics at the well and compare them with the shaped flow profile at a particular time, as well as take into account various well interventions or even analyze the interference with the neighbouring producing and injection wells [2, 4].

First, looking at the Fig. 11 which shows production history as well as the time points of sampling, it is noted that the water cut on average below 10%. The bottom-hole pressure, however, is very unstable, it ranges from 217 to 267 atm, and in January 2021, the pressure drops to 52 atm. The fluid flow rate before the well shutdown (August 2020) has a specific pattern, showing a decrease from 69 to 25 m^3/day from the commissioning. After a short-term well shutdown, the starting fluid flow rate gradually decreases and comes to stay at 22 m^3/day approximately in a month.

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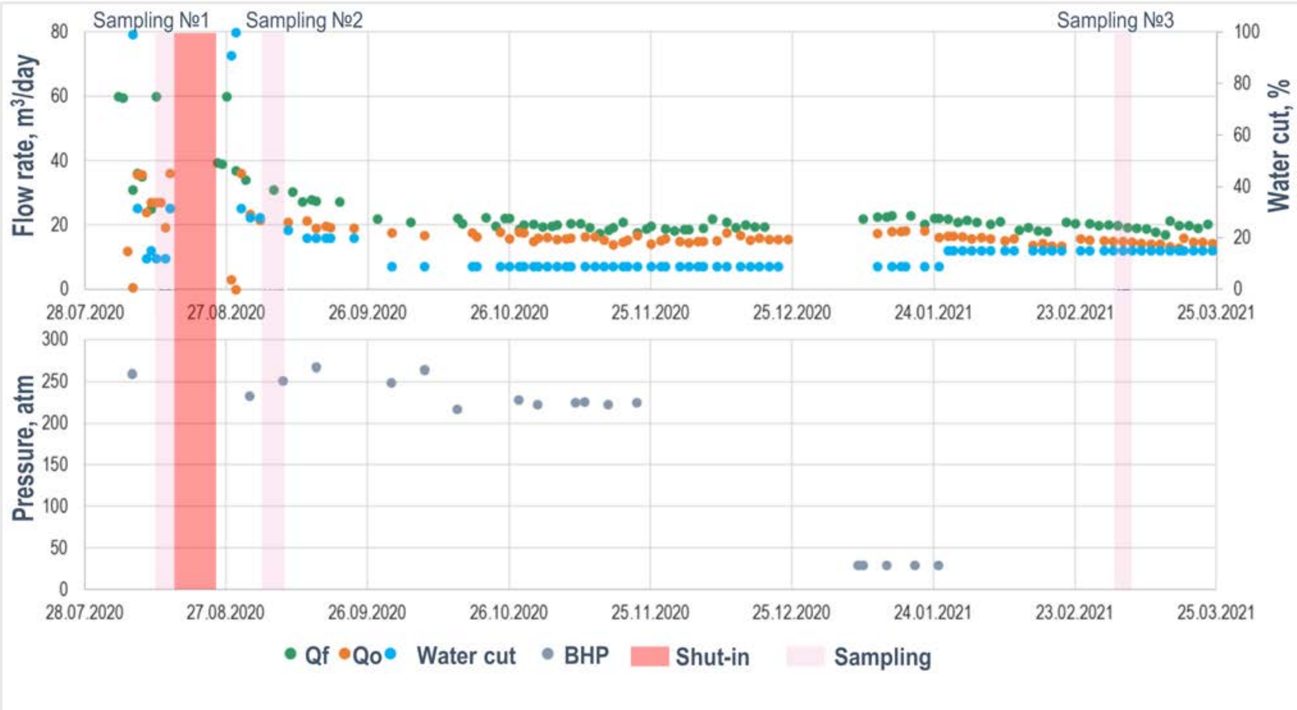

Figure 11—Production history of tested well

As noted earlier, fluid samples were taken three times: at the initial flowback period, which is characterised by transient flows, in September 2020 (the well operated a transition mode), and in March 2021 when the steady-state production mode was reached. In this regard, production profiling revealed that the initial recovery rate remained at the same level from the beginning of the well commissioning (Fig. 12). With the new level of zonal production surveillance, the end user can evaluate the decision made to drill and frac the lateral. A consistently high flow rate has been observed for a long time from the sidetrack lateral. This was determined by the fact that the hydraulic fracturing lead into expansion of the drainage area outbound the directional borehole, while the parent vertical hole was not subjected to any reservoir stimulation measures. After 6 months of well operation, the contribution of the sidetrack lateral shows gradual decrease from 81 to 66 %. This decline in production can be explained by several factors: first, the production is affected by the specifics of the target reservoir since the AC10.1-3 formation does not have high porosity and permeability (the average permeability is 1 mD) and, in addition, the deposit is highly heterogeneous. Secondly, the target formation area is closely drilled, which leaves the possibility of strong interference between the neighbouring producing wells open. In addition, the reservoir pressure maintenance system in the drainage area of the well does not balance a decreasing reservoir pressure, which also affects the dynamics of production. Such insights allow the end user to evaluate the economics of drilling the lateral for the future wells and get quick insights on any production interference from surrounding wells.

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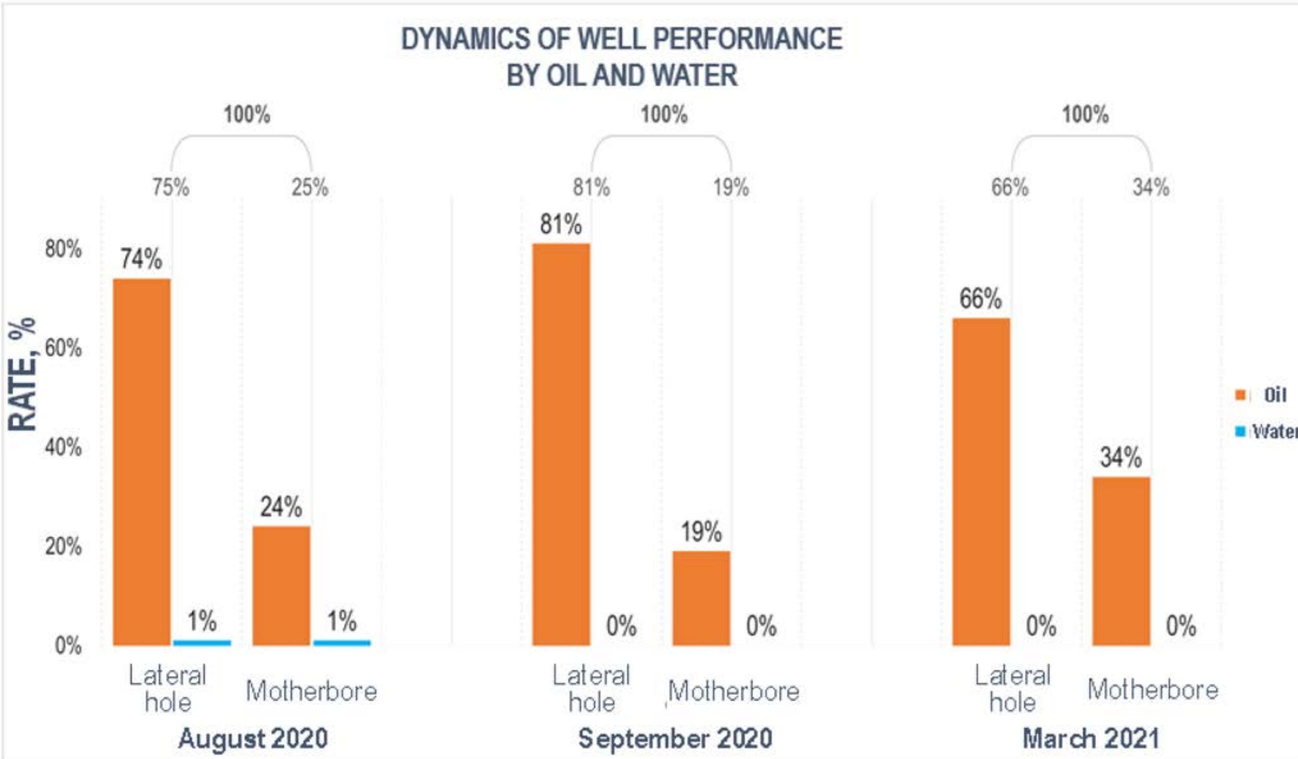

Figure 12—Tracer-based production logging

Thus, the results of production surveillance helped evaluate the multi – lateral completion strategy in the context of its contribution to the well performance; detect gradual depletion during long-term production profiling surveillance; and also make assumptions concerning the reasons for the gradual decline in the oil production.

Results and Conclusion

Application of the dynamic marker technology for inflow profile monitoring takes obvious advantages comparing with traditional PLT methods such as:

1. Prevented HSE and operational risks without deploying asset-heavy logging tools into the well
2. Reduced the cost of well inflow profile monitoring
3. Reduced uncertainty of the results interpretation obtained in the case of a complex fluid flow pattern and low flow rates
4. Long-term monitoring of each of the laterals without well operation changes.

The marker systems placed in multilateral well of the tested field yielded data on the operation of each of the laterals over time, allowed to evaluate the hydraulic fracturing operation in the sidetrack and estimate whether well reconstruction was performed efficiently, and a higher production was achieved.

The implementation of the combined marker solutions enabled quantification of the multilateral well performance, as well as the involvement of the remaining oil reserves of the parent borehole into production.

Based on performed field test of marker technology in multilateral well it was decided to implement the same methodology for numerous upcoming multirateral wells at the field and to assess the reserves recovery at the area and get information for effective field development optimization.

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