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| 1 | | APPEARANCES | | |
| 2 | | | | |
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- 1 EXAMINER McMILLAN: I'd like to call Case
- 2 Number 15448, application of Mewbourne Oil Company
- for a nonstandard oil spacing and proration unit and
- 4 compulsory pooling, Eddy County, New Mexico.
- 5 Call for appearances.
- 6 MR. BRUCE: Mr. Examiner, Jim Bruce of
- 7 Santa Fe representing Mewbourne Oil Company.
- 8 EXAMINER McMILLAN: Any other appearances?
- 9 MR. HALL: Mr. Examiner, Scott Hall,
- 10 Montgomery & Andrews, Santa Fe, appearing on behalf
- of EGL Resources, Incorporated, and Black Mountain
- 12 Operating Company.
- And, Mr. Examiner, I believe you can also
- 14 call Case 15449.
- 15 EXAMINER McMILLAN: Okay. This will be
- 16 combined with Case Number 15449, application of
- 17 Mewbourne Oil Company for a nonstandard oil spacing
- and proration unit and compulsory pooling, Eddy
- 19 County, New Mexico.
- I assume the appearances will be the same?
- MR. HALL: Yes, sir.
- MR. BRUCE: Yes, sir.
- 23 EXAMINER McMILLAN: I quess the first
- 24 thing we're going to do is talk about the motion to
- 25 dismiss?

- 1 MR. BRUCE: Correct.
- 2 EXAMINER McMILLAN: Okay. Please proceed
- 3 with that.
- 4 MR. HALL: It's my motion, Mr. Examiner.
- 5 So by its applications in these two cases,
- 6 Mewbourne is asking you to force pool acreage that
- 7 my clients contend is covered by an existing
- 8 operating agreement. And because an operating
- 9 agreement is the same as a voluntary plan for
- 10 consolidation, compulsory pooling authority under
- 11 the pooling statute cannot be applied.
- 12 Mewbourne is going to dispute the
- 13 applicability of the operating agreement. They are
- 14 contending that the operating agreement has expired
- 15 by virtue of some of gaps in production from a well
- 16 that's located on the acreage.
- 17 And this is -- for the record, let me get
- 18 the acreage. It's the -- for both units it's
- 19 basically the south half of Section 28, Township 18
- 20 south, Range 29 east.
- 21 And Mewbourne is proposing two 160-acre
- 22 wells in the north half/south half, and the other
- 23 south half/south half.
- And so if you would refer to our motion,
- 25 we have given you some excerpts from the operating

- 1 agreement. And the salient language in that has to
- 2 do with the term of the agreement.
- 3 We've outlined that for you at page 2 of
- 4 our motion, and I can summarize this language for
- 5 you, basically.
- 6 So the term of the agreement shall
- 7 continue in force so long as any well or wells
- 8 produce or are capable of production, and for an
- 9 additional period of 90 days from cessation of all
- 10 production.
- That's the focus of our inquiry today.
- 12 There -- I think it's undisputed.
- 13 If you look at the motion and the
- 14 response, there was a Morrow well drilled on the
- 15 south half of Section 28 years and years ago, and I
- 16 could anticipate that Mr. Bruce is going to provide
- 17 you with some OCD production information for that
- 18 well. It's the Trigg-Jennings Com Number 1
- 19 originally drilled to the Morrow.
- We acknowledge there were some gaps in
- 21 production.
- In 2004 my client, EGL Resources,
- 23 reentered that well and recompleted it in the Strawn
- 24 formation, and it's continued to produce from that
- 25 ever since the recompletion.

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- 1 MR. BROOKS: Right.
- 2 MR. HALL: And so Mewbourne will point out
- 3 to you that, Well, we have these gaps in production;
- 4 and, therefore, the operating agreement terminated
- 5 by its own terms. And we disagree with that.
- 6 Because if you look specifically at the
- 7 language it says, as I said, wells -- so long as any
- 8 well or wells produced or are capable of producing.
- 9 It doesn't say must be producing in paying
- 10 quantities. It just says capable of producing.
- And so what we've done is, we provided you
- 12 with what I've marked as Exhibit Number 1, and
- 13 that's the affidavit of John Langhoff. He's a
- 14 petroleum engineer for EGL Resources.
- And appended to his affidavit is a well
- 16 workover report that begins on April 26, 2004.
- 17 That's the very first entry, and that's when EGL
- 18 moved in to recomplete the well in the Strawn.
- And what they did, if you look at that
- 20 very first entry, when they took the casing valve
- 21 off, the well began to flow out of the Morrow
- 22 formation and they had to kill the well in order to
- 23 do the recompletion.
- 24 So Mr. Langhoff was on location for that
- 25 workover. And his affidavit indicates as much, that

- 1 the well was capable of producing and, in fact, it
- 2 flowed from the Morrow.
- 3 They continued with the operation and put
- 4 the Strawn on completion, so I think that
- 5 establishes that the well was capable of production
- 6 and has been producing ever since.
- 7 So we have also provided you with -- if
- 8 you'll refer to a copy of Exhibit Number 2.
- 9 Exhibit Number 2 is an excerpted copy of a
- 10 52-page drilling title opinion that Mewbourne Oil
- 11 Company generated in-house just this year.
- 12 And what I've done for you is, I've
- 13 attempted to give you every page of that title
- 14 opinion where the existence of this operating
- 15 agreement is noted.
- And if you'll look at page 2, the first
- 17 notation of that is the operating agreement dated
- 18 February 5, 1979, covering the south half of
- 19 Section 28, and it is noted in 10 other places in
- 20 here.
- 21 And I can represent to you -- and I have
- 22 the complete title opinion. If you wish to wade
- 23 through 52 pages of title opinion I can leave that
- 24 with you.
- But I can represent to you that nowhere in

- 1 that title opinion does it say the operating
- 2 agreement does not apply to these lands. It says
- 3 just the opposite.
- If you will look at page 8, for instance,
- 5 at the very top of the page it says this interest --
- 6 and it's talking about lease interest.
- 7 "This interest is subject to an operating
- 8 agreement dated February 5, 1979."
- 9 And if you look at the bottom of page 8 it
- 10 shows that the title examiner has credited my
- 11 client, EGL Resources, with a contract interest
- 12 under the operating agreement.
- 13 Mewbourne is recognizing the applicability
- 14 of the operating agreement in its own title opinion.
- So what I think this means for you,
- 16 Mr. Examiner, is your inquiry is to focus on whether
- 17 or not an operating agreement exists in this case.
- 18 It's not for you to interpret it.
- 19 We think the operating agreement is clear
- 20 and unambiguous, in the sense that as long as there
- 21 is a well capable of production the operating
- 22 agreement continues to subsist --
- Now I will point out to you, when you look
- 24 at the term of operating agreements, the level of
- 25 scrutiny is much higher than what you would give to

- 1 a conveyance, a lease, or an assignment.
- 2 An operating agreement is not an
- 3 instrument of conveyance.
- 4 The term is not a clause of limitation.
- 5 It's not a habendum clause. It's not automatic.
- 6 Someone under an operating agreement who
- 7 has contractual rights has to make an affirmative
- 8 step to seek the termination of an operating
- 9 agreement, and that's not been done here.
- 10 However, I would point out to you, if you
- 11 would look back to the operating -- or title
- 12 opinion.
- 13 If you look at page 11 of that and the
- 14 preceding page -- so the preceding page, page 10, is
- 15 a portion of the lease summary.
- And the lease that I've highlighted for
- 17 . you here is Federal Lease NMNM030752. It's shown
- 18 covering most of the south half of Section 28.
- 19 I've underlined that for you there.
- Then you will look at the explanation for
- 21 that lease, and I will quote to you from the title
- 22 opinion itself. And this is discussing the term of
- 23 the lease. It says:
- "By decision dated January 9, 2015,
- 25 communitization agreement CASRN1567 terminated;

- 1 therefore, Federal Lease NMNM030752, which is held
- 2 by actual production, was automatically extended two
- 3 years, through December 1, 2011, and for so long
- 4 thereafter as oil and gas is produced in pay
- 5 quantities."
- 6 So that's a far lower threshold of inquiry
- 7 that the title examiner makes when he's looking at
- 8 the effective -- effectiveness of the lease.
- 9 And in this case they found that the lease
- 10 was good. Even though there may have been gaps in
- 11 production, the lease continued in full force and
- 12 effect beyond the point in 2004 when the workover
- 13 was started.
- So that's just an example. If the lease
- 15 subsisted, then the operating agreement has to
- 16 subsist as well.
- And finally, if you would look at what
- 18 we've marked as Exhibit Number 3, that's the
- 19 affidavit of Wes Perry. He's president of EGL
- 20 Resources. And this is simply an affidavit
- 21 authenticating the title opinion which they obtained
- 22 from Mewbourne. It's maintained in EGL's files.
- 23 Again I have available to you, if you
- 24 wish, full copies of both the operating agreement
- 25 and the title opinion.

- 1 And that concludes my argument.
- 2 MR. BROOKS: Well, I have some questions.
- 3 But I guess the first one, before I allow Mr. --
- 4 before I invite Mr. Bruce to respond -- I'm assuming
- 5 he probably wants to -- but the question of these
- 6 exhibits.
- 7 Are you going to offer those in evidence
- 8 for the purposes of this motion to compel?
- 9 MR. HALL: Yes, and I do so.
- 10 MR. BROOKS: Okay. And that's Exhibits 1,
- 11 2, and 3?
- MR. HALL: Right.
- MR. BRUCE: I have no objections.
- MR. BROOKS: Okay. Exhibits 1, 2, and 3
- 15 will be admitted for purposes of ruling on the
- 16 motion to compel.
- MR. BROOKS: And you may proceed to
- 18 respond.
- 19 Well, I have one threshold question for
- 20 you.
- Is there any dispute that the interest
- 22 in -- to Mewbourne -- of Mewbourne is governed by
- 23 this operating agreement if, indeed, it is in force?
- 24 MR. BRUCE: Mewbourne asserts that the JOA
- 25 does not affect its interest because the agreement

- 1 terminated.
- 2 MR. BROOKS: I agree. I understood that
- 3 from your response.
- But is it -- is it agreed that Mewbourne
- 5 derives its interest from a party who was bound by
- 6 the joint operating agreement originally? There's
- 7 no dispute about that?
- 8 MR. BRUCE: Yeah. I mean they derive
- 9 parties from -- the interest from the JOA owners.
- MR. HALL: Yes.
- MR. BROOKS: I wanted to clarify that for
- 12 the record.
- Okay. You may proceed, Mr. Bruce.
- MR. BRUCE: Yes. Mr. Examiner, in what
- 15 you were talking about earlier, if you'd -- let's go
- 16 to my response to the motion.
- 17 Attached as Exhibit A is simply the
- 18 well -- the original well completion report in the
- 19 Morrow formation from January -- the well was
- 20 completed in April of 1979 in the Morrow formation
- and did produce for a number of years from the
- 22 Morrow formation.
- MR. BROOKS: Okay.
- MR. BRUCE: And also attached is a C-102.
- 25 And then attached as Exhibit D is the well

- 1 completion report in the Strawn formation from May
- 2 of 2004, along with the dedication plat.
- 3 But again, we are looking at the same
- 4 provision that Scott referenced. The agreement
- 5 remains valid for as long as there is a well capable
- 6 of producing plus 90 days, and so I think we're
- 7 looking at the clear language of the JOA.
- 8 First and foremost, I would say that I
- 9 think when something says capable of producing, the
- 10 implication at law is producing in paying
- 11 quantities. Certainly that's the interpretation of
- 12 oil and gas leases.
- So I don't think you just look at marginal
- 14 production, I think you look at producing in paying
- 15 quantities.
- And looking at that, then you turn to
- 17 exhibit -- Attachment B to my response and turn to
- 18 the production plat.
- And in the OCD readouts of production, I
- 20 think if you look at that, certainly there was no
- 21 production for a year. Absolutely zero production
- 22 for a year.
- 23 And for about four years before that it
- 24 was not capable of producing in paying quantities.
- 25 If you look at the production from prior

- 1 years, sometimes it might have produced 17 MCF a
- 2 month, 1 MCF a month, 22 MCF a month.
- 3 Even at that point, under those operating
- 4 costs, it was not capable of producing in paying
- 5 quantities.
- And then for a while it was apparently
- 7 incapable of producing at all.
- 8 I recognize what Scott said about his
- 9 affidavit saying that when they went in to rework
- 10 the well they had to kill the well; there was some
- 11 production problem.
- 12 If that was the case, why didn't they just
- 13 continue producing from the Morrow? Clearly, it was
- 14 not capable of producing in paying quantities.
- And based thereon, we assert that the --
- 16 one more thing.
- I think you have to look at capable
- 18 production, not just there's some uphole zone. I
- 19 think you're looking at what the well is completed
- 20 in.
- 21 And it definitely ceased producing for 90
- 22 days from the Morrow formation. You don't look at
- 23 speculative uphole zones.
- Was the well capable of producing from the
- 25 zone it was completed in?

- 1 And it clearly was not capable of doing
- 2 that.
- 3 And they have produced no evidence that
- 4 the ratif- -- that the JOA was ratified after 2004,
- 5 and I think you need something in writing to ratify
- 6 it.
- 7 And therefore we assert, again, that the
- 8 JOA has terminated by its own terms and Mewbourne is
- 9 entitled to move forward with its forced pooling.
- 10 MR. BROOKS: What was -- if I had the
- 11 production data in front of me -- and I believe
- 12 Mr. McMillan has it.
- 13 But what was the last month before
- 14 April 26, 2004, that this well -- that production
- 15 from this well was reporting to the OCD?
- MR. BRUCE: Well, it was reported in March
- of 2000- -- well, wait a minute. Let me get the
- 18 right amount.
- And on what I gave you, the printout from
- 20 the OCD, it does reference whether the production
- 21 was from the Turkey Track Morrow north pool or from
- 22 the Empire Strawn gas pool.
- 23 MR. BROOKS: That was what I was noticing
- 24 yesterday, and I thought usually we reported --
- 25 usually production was shown separately from

- 1 different pools. But it looked like there was only
- 2 one production table in that file, which surprised
- 3 me.
- 4 MR. BRUCE: Yeah. But looking at
- 5 production from 2003 to 2004, in January of 2000- --
- 6 let me make sure I've got the right numbers here.
- 7 In January of 2003 the well produced 44
- 8 MCF of gas.
- 9 In February of 2003, zero.
- March of 2003, 4 MCF of gas.
- MR. BROOKS: So there was production
- 12 reporting in very small quantities --
- MR. BRUCE: So in --
- MR. BROOKS: -- through March of 2004 or
- 15 2003?
- 16 MR. BRUCE: 2003.
- 17 MR. BROOKS: 2003. What about 2000- --
- MR. BRUCE: In 2004 it did not produce
- 19 until May of 2004, and that was Strawn production.
- 20 Although -- although it -- the heading at
- 21 the top for 2004 says Turkey Track Morrow, clearly,
- 22 the well was recompleted in May of 2000- --
- MR. BROOKS: Well, the specific question I
- 24 was interested in, I believe, then, was -- is that
- 25 the last time it produced from the Morrow was March

- 1 of 2003.
- 2 Is that correct?
- 3 MR. BRUCE: That's correct.
- 4 MR. BROOKS: I mean reported production.
- 5 MR. BRUCE: Reported production, yeah.
- 6 So 46 MCF for the 2003 calendar year. I
- 7 mean, you're talking hundreds of dollars of revenue,
- 8 maybe.
- 9 Maybe a hundred dollars of revenue for the
- 10 year.
- MR. BROOKS: Now, if I had brought my --
- 12 my copy of the motion to compel down here as I
- 13 intended to do, but I got down here without it -- I
- 14 would know the answer to this question, I quess,
- 15 because it's probably on the cover sheet of -- you
- 16 probably included the cover sheet of the operating
- 17 agreement.
- MR. BRUCE: Uh-huh.
- MR. BROOKS: But my question, then, is:
- 20 Which edition of the AAPL oper- -- form is this?
- 21 MR. HALL: 1977.
- MR. BROOKS: That's an old one. Hopefully
- 23 they've improved this language since then.
- 24 Are you through, Mr. Bruce?
- MR. BRUCE: I'm through.

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- 1 MR. BROOKS: Do you have anything further,
- 2 Mr. Hall?
- 3 MR. HALL: Yeah. I'll just point out at
- 4 page 2 of the response to our motion to dismiss,
- 5 Mewbourne is asking you to make the determination
- 6 that there was no production in paying quantities.
- 7 And again, I would invite you to look at
- 8 the expressed language of the operating agreement.
- 9 The term paying is not expressed anywhere in there.
- 10 There's nothing about automatically terminates. You
- 11 won't find language like that in the operating
- 12 agreement.
- 13 MR. BROOKS: Right.
- 14 MR. HALL: I've written more than one
- 15 title opinion in my career, as I know Mr. Bruce has.
- MR. BROOKS: And I have.
- MR. HALL: And you ignore these operating
- 18 agreements to your peril, and so you do have to deal
- 19 with them. Frankly, I don't know how Mewbourne gets
- 20 around it's own title agreement in this case.
- MR. BRUCE: I agree, in part, with Scott
- 22 that old JOAs have become the bane of my title
- 23 existence.
- MR. BROOKS: Well, at the risk of being
- 25 accused of assisting my brethren in the profession

- 1 with -- and to accumulate billable hours, I'm going
- 2 to ask you-all to brief the issues in this case,
- 3 because I have read various cases having to do with
- 4 lease termination.
- Now, I don't recall that I've ever read a
- 6 case that construed a provision like this. That's
- 7 one. That's Item 1.
- 8 If there's anything that construes this
- 9 kind of provision in an operating agreement,
- 10 specifically this form, because it was widely used
- 11 for a period of time -- probably not as widely used
- 12 as -- what was it, the 1982 form was the next one?
- MR. HALL: I think that's right.
- MR. BRUCE: Correct.
- MR. BROOKS: The fact that this exact form
- 16 was probably -- this exact form was probably not the
- 17 current form for very long may have limited its use,
- 18 although some people like it.
- But if there's anything that construes
- 20 this particular provision in any jurisdiction, I
- 21 would be interested to find it. I realize it's not
- 22 easy to find -- it would not be easy to find because
- 23 what sequence of words would a Court use to describe
- 24 it? That's hard to predict.
- 25 And you're going to get -- if you're

- 1 working on capable of production, you're going to
- 2 get a gazillion hits, and most of them are going to
- 3 be lease cases.
- 4 MR. BRUCE: Correct.
- 5 MR. BROOKS: The other aspect that
- 6 fascinates me about this case is that it's
- 7 well-established that the New Mexico Oil
- 8 Conservation Division -- and I think it's probably
- 9 true of conservation agencies in just about every
- 10 state that has them -- does not have the authority
- 11 to construe contracts.
- But we're in a case here where if we have
- 13 jurisdiction to determine jurisdiction, we would
- 14 have to exercise it by construing the contract,
- 15 because you can't come to a conclusion about this
- 16 without construing the contract.
- 17 So that's an issue: What is the authority
- 18 of the Oil Conservation Division when it -- what
- 19 does the Oil Conservation Division do when it can
- 20 only determine whether it can proceed to make a
- 21 decision in the case by first construing a contract?
- 22 And my guess is, there's -- I think
- 23 there's no author- -- I'm reasonably convinced
- 24 there's no authority on that in New Mexico.
- 25 But I could stand to be corrected if I

- 1 have overlooked something.
- 2 MR. BRUCE: Could we not ask the oldest
- 3 person in the room, Bill Carr?
- 4 MR. BROOKS: Well, you know, I would
- 5 certainly appreciate a friend of the Court
- 6 contributing any information he might have.
- 7 MR. CARR: I'll see if I can formalize the
- 8 relationship.
- 9 MR. BROOKS: But I'm not aware of any
- 10 authority in New Mexico, and I have perused the
- 11 decisions, the relatively few decisions involving
- 12 the Oil Conservation Division in New Mexico, with
- 13 considerable care over the last 15 years.
- 14 But there might be in Texas or Oklahoma,
- where there's a lot more conservation -- oil
- 16 conservation cases than there are in New Mexico.
- 17 So I'm giving you assignment -- an
- 18 assignment on which there -- you may be able to
- 19 accumulate a significant number of billable hours.
- 20 But that -- my recommendation to the
- 21 examiner is going to be that we take this motion to
- 22 dismiss under advisement and proceed to receive
- 23 evidence on the merits.
- 24 So if you-all are prepared to go forward
- 25 on the merits.

- 1 Are you so prepared, Mr. Bruce?
- 2 MR. BRUCE: I'm prepared, yeah, but not
- 3 on -- not today at this time.
- 4 MR. BROOKS: Not today? Okay. Very good.
- 5 Then we will have to continue this case
- 6 until such time as --
- 7 MR. BRUCE: And I was going to ask, with
- 8 respect to filing briefs, I -- you know, normally we
- 9 generally say two weeks. I was wondering if we
- 10 could ask for three.
- MR. BROOKS: That's fine with me. I've
- 12 got plenty of other things to do.
- MR. BRUCE: And then maybe continue the
- 14 case provisionally for four weeks, Scott?
- MR. HALL: I think that's all right.
- 16 April 14 is not looking --
- MR. BROOKS: April 14 is getting awfully
- 18 full.
- MR. HALL: Yeah.
- MR. BROOKS: Of course it may get emptied
- 21 rapidly, like today's docket did.
- Okay. I will turn it back over to you,
- 23 Mr. McMillan.
- 24 EXAMINER McMILLAN: Okay. We're going
- 25 to...

- 1 MR. JONES: Are you going to wait to rule
- 2 on those two, the motion and --
- MR. BROOKS: I'm going to take the motion
- 4 under -- I propose we take the motion under
- 5 advisement.
- 6 MR. JONES: But you're going to take the
- 7 evidence they come up with?
- 8 MR. BROOKS: Yeah. My idea is to take the
- 9 evidence so we can provide the director with a
- 10 complete record.
- 11 My theory on this is that this motion to
- 12 dismiss, to raise these, is a dispositive -- is, in
- 13 effect, a dispositive motion; and, therefore, it is
- 14 something that the examiner probably does not have
- 15 the authority to rule on. It's something that the
- 16 director would have to make the decision on.
- So what I will do, if -- once we've heard
- 18 the evidence -- is Mr. McMillan will -- I will
- 19 invite Mr. McMillan to write an order that is
- 20 subject to our ruling on the motion to dismiss.
- Then I will write a proposed order on the
- 22 motion to dismiss, and we'll submit them both to the
- 23 Honorable Mr. Catanach and let him make a decision.
- MR. BRUCE: Okay.
- 25 EXAMINER McMILLAN: So we will take the

- 1 motion under advisement, and we will go forward with
- 2 the case based on the merits, and it shall be
- 3 continued until April 28.
- 4 MR. BROOKS: Okay. And I would add
- 5 that -- I don't know if you've been notified of -- I
- 6 think the order in Case 15433 was signed yesterday.
- 7 Is that correct?
- 8 MR. HALL: I heard something about that.
- 9 MR. BROOKS: My name doesn't appear on
- 10 that order, but I wrote an opinion on your motion to
- 11 dismiss, which is basically incorporated within that
- 12 order.
- But it has noth- -- it doesn't have
- 14 anything -- it doesn't contribute to anything in
- 15 this case because the facts are very different.
- 16 So...
- 17 MR. HALL: I agree.
- MR. BROOKS: I don't think it has anything
- 19 to do with this case.
- 20 MR. HALL: I can't wait to read it.
- 21 MR. BROOKS: Well, I am not known for
- 22 being short of wind.
- Thank you.
- 24 EXAMINER McMILLAN: Okay. This concludes
- 25 today's docket, and thank you very much.

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| 1 (Proceedings concluded at 10:35 a.m.) | | |
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| 17 a complete record of the proceedings the Examiner hearing of Case No. | 151 | |
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| 19 Oil Conservation Division | lner | |
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