Physical and chemical energy storage in the abandoned offshore reservoirs

Ali A. Eftekhari

The existing and in development offshore windmills in the North Sea will ensure the availability of abundant and cheap electricity in the region, yet fail to address the intermittent nature of the wind resources. The surplus electricity in the windy days and off peak time can be converted to physical (compressed and hot fluids) or chemical (synthetic fuels such as ammonia, methanol, or methane) forms and stored in the reservoirs. The stored energy is extracted and converted to electricity when there is a shortage of wind, or consumed as clean fuels for transportation. This project aims to study the feasibility of subsurface physical and chemical energy storage and extraction as an alternative for the abandonment of the North Sea oil and gas reservoirs. The feasibility and environmental impacts/benefits of the following energy storage processes will be investigated: green hydrogen, ammonia, methane, methanol, and compressed air. The main focus points of the project are the investigation and quantification of

1- the importance of subsurface energy storage for the future energy plans of Denmark.

2- the required subsurface and topside criteria for the operation of the subsurface storage projects.

3- the energy efficiency of different energy storage and extraction processes.

The report is organized in four chapters. In chapter 1, the electricity supply and demand of Denmark is analyzed and adjusted for the year 2050. The average surplus electricity is quantified and the time series data for both surplus and shortage of electricity is presented. Based on the presented data, the minimum efficiency requirement, the capacity of the synthetic fuel production processes, and the minimum subsurface volume requirement are quantified. In chapter 2 the energy efficiency of the production of different energy storage media is presented. In chapter 3, the energy efficiency of the subsurface energy storage and subsequent production is quantified using a mathematical model for the single phase single component compressible flow in porous media. Finally, in chapter 4 the main findings of this report and suggestions for future work are given.

# Problem definition[chap:Problem-definition]

There are exceeding scientific evidence for the role of anthropological carbon dioxide emission in an accelerated climate change, with potentially disastrous -although uncertain- aftermath. This has increased the societal pressure for a faster transition from hydrocarbon-based to renewable-based energy. Besides these political and societal motivations, the declining conventional oil resources has reduced the efficiency of oil and gas recovery operations and increased the costs, leading eventually to the cessation of production and abandonment of the fields. The infrastructures, e.g. wells, platforms, topside equipment for transport and processing, and transport pipelines, even though still functional, will have to be removed as part of the abandonment operation.

At the same time, the renewable energy resources will grow in many areas of the world. In the North Sea region, several new windfarms are planned or under construction, which will quadruple the capacity of renewable electricity production. This capacity that is several times more than the electricity demand in Denmark, is variable and intermittent and thus will not replace the reliable fossil-fuel power plants. The key factor in the transition to a fully renewable energy infrastructure is a large scale energy storage that can act as a buffer to provide a continuous power stream to the grids.

This project will investigate the feasibility of the alternative use of the “to-be-abandoned” fields of the North Sea and their infrastructure as a large energy storage project that can address the intermittency of the wind energy in the North Sea region.

There are three major questions that will be answered in this work. First, how much energy storage is needed in Denmark? Secondly, to what extent can the subsurface storage be helpful? Thirdly, what are the promising technologies from a technical point of view. This report will provide simple, reproducible, and realistic procedures and quantitative answers to these questions.

## Future energy need of Denmark

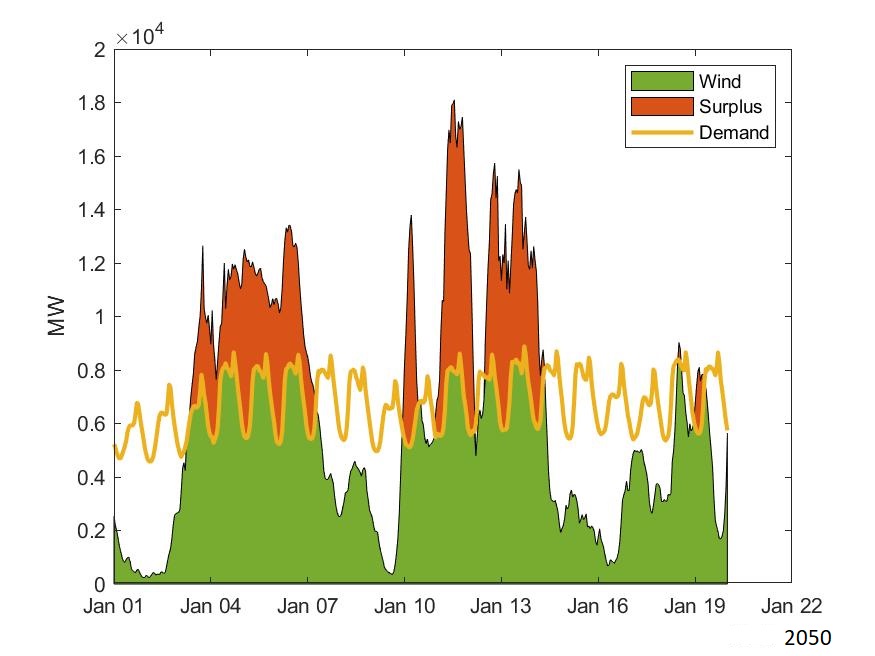
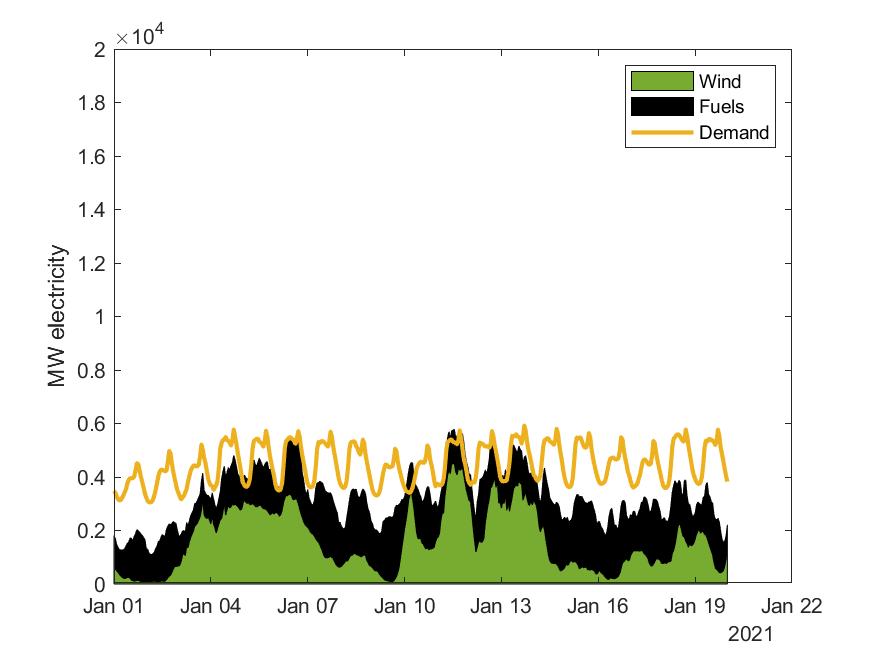
Denmark currently consumes around 100 kWh per person per day of energy in different forms. Eftekhari showed that this can be further categorized into a 30-30-40 category: 30% electricity, 30% heat, and 40% hydrocarbon fuel. Note that the hydrocarbon consumption for electricity production is not included in the 40% hydrocarbon fuel. We can assume that in the future, all the warming systems and short distance transport will be electrified; therefore, by assuming a realistic coefficient of performance for the future warming systems, the 30-30-40 can be roughly converted to 45-40, i.e. a demand of 45 kWh/day electricity per person and 40 kWh/day liquid fuel per person. This is the energy demand that I will use in the rest of this report. As for electricity production, the current plan is to quadruple the current electricity capacity of the wind mills in the North Sea. Since the capacity is not equal to the actual produced electricity (due to, e.g. technical problems, curtailment, weather conditions, etc.) I will estimate the intermittent electricity production of the windmills by quadrupling the current electricity production in Denmark. The data is available from Energinet.dk website and also as an electronic attachment to this report, including several Matlab functions for analysis and visualizations.

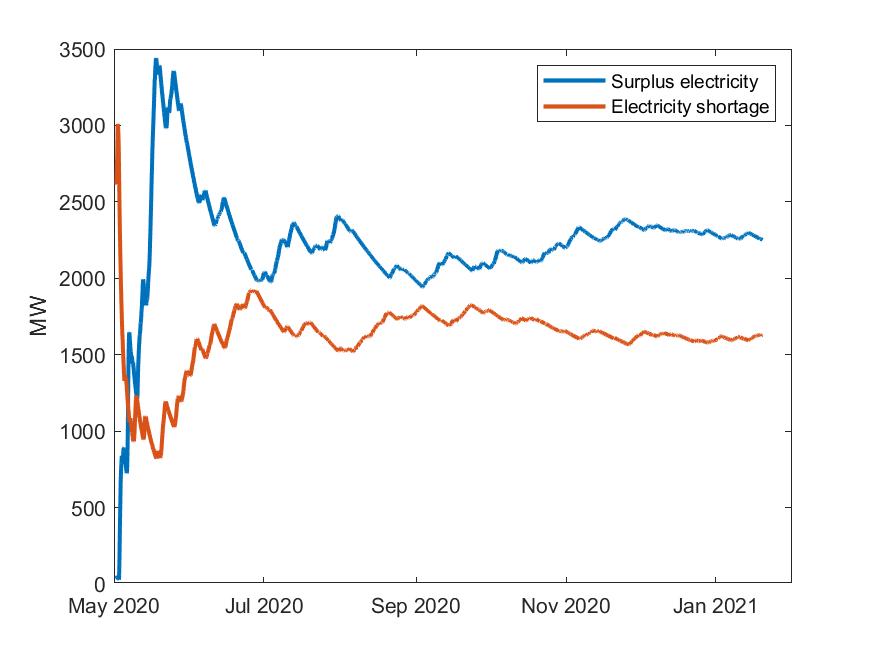
Fig. [1.2](#fig:Current-and-future) shows the electricity supply and demand for January 2020 (left) and January 2050 (right). We can use the following equation to integrate the data and obtain the average energy supply and demand over different periods of time, i.e. from 24 hours to 6 month, as shown in Fig. [[eq:average-energy-demand]](#eq:average-energy-demand):

where [MW] is the electricity supply or demand in the future and [s] and [s] represent a certain time period. The future energy supply and demand are estimated by using the correction factor extracted from , e.g.

where denotes a 50% in electricity demand and denotes a 400% increase of windmill capacity in Denmark . Note that this increase will be on the offshore sector only; however, here we assume that the overall wind energy capacity will increase by a factor of four. The other assumption in Eq. ([[eq:demand-adjust]](#eq:demand-adjust)) is that the weather (more specifically, wind) in 2050 will be similar to the weather condition in 2020. The visualized energy supply and demand in Fig. [1.2](#fig:Current-and-future) shows that periodically, the wind electricity supply is higher or lower than the electricity demand, creating electricity surplus and shortage, respectively. The alternation between surplus and shortage can occur within a few hours to few weeks. This is better visualized in Fig. [1.3](#fig:Average-electricity-supply) that shows the average surplus and shortage for periods of 24 hours to 8 months. It can be observed that after around 6 months, the average surplus and shortage reach a constant value. This plot unveils three critical pieces of information about the wind electricity supply and demand in 2050: first, the average shortage of electricity is 1.6 GW, which is a large amount of power and gives an indication of the amount of energy that needs to be stored (although sometimes the actual power shortage is temporarily higher as shown later). The good news is that the average electricity surplus is 2.25 GW, which is 620 MW higher than the average electricity shortage. These two numbers, however, serve as a constraint for the energy storage technology that is defined by

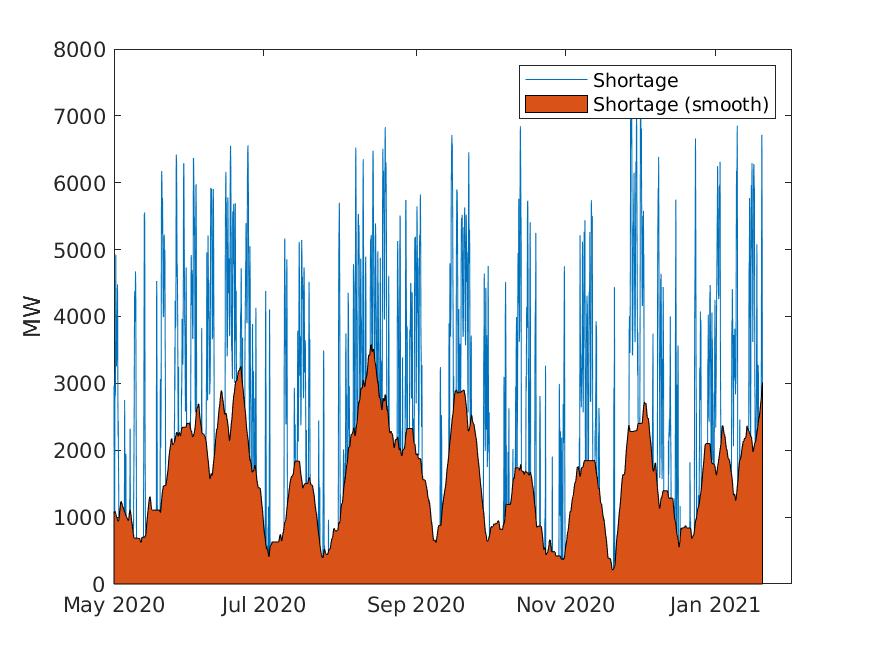
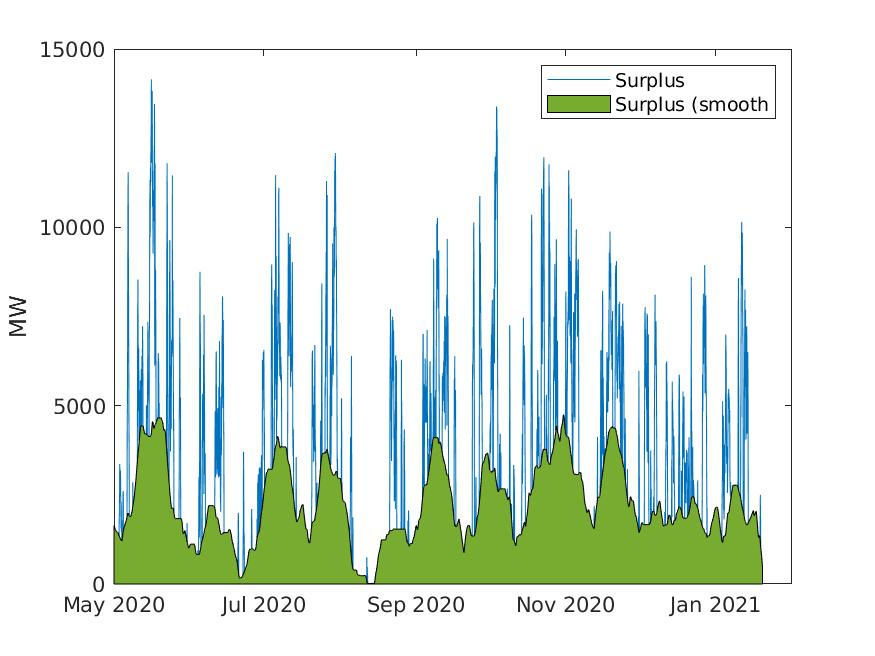
i.e. the efficiency of the storage technology must be higher than 72%.





[fig:Average-electricity-supply]Average electricity supply and demand for Denmark adjusted for May 2050 to January 2051; see Eq. ([[eq:average-energy-demand]](#eq:average-energy-demand))

Although the previous analysis provides the average storage value, the real time electricity surplus that needs to be stored varies with time. The same occurs with the electricity shortage, i.e. the occasional electricity shortage can be much higher than its long-term average value. Both of these values are shown in Fig. [1.5](#fig:Electricity-surplus-smooth). Any feasible storage process must be able to store a maximum power surplus of 5.0 to 10.0 GW (see the peaks of the curves in Fig. [1.5](#fig:Electricity-surplus-smooth)-left) and recuperate the stored power with a maximum rate of 3.0 to 6.0 GW (see the peaks of the curves in Fig. [1.5](#fig:Electricity-surplus-smooth)-right). These values are critical in the design of the storage and recuperation processes. The sizing of the required equipment and sub-processes will be discussed in the next sections.

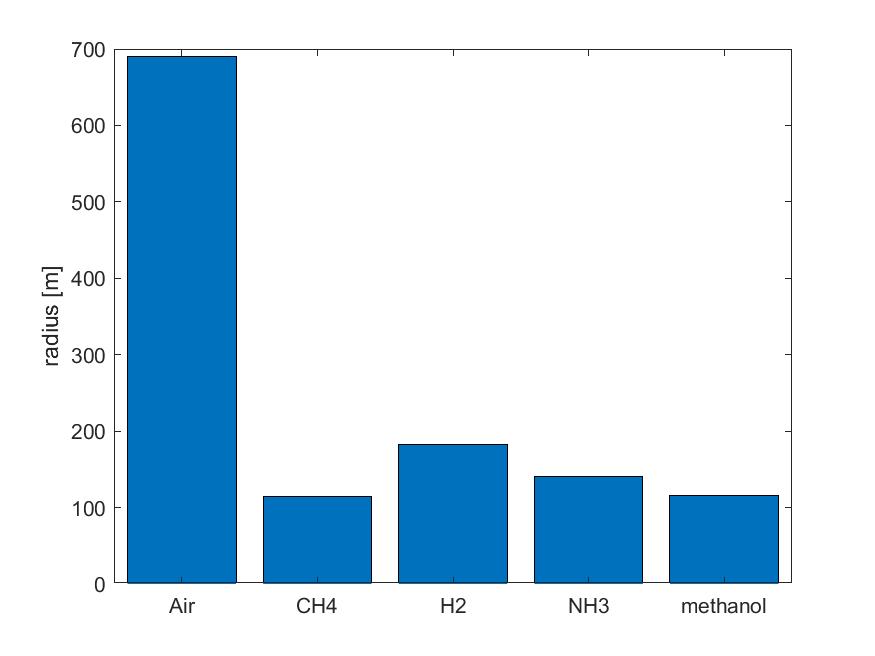


We end this section by estimating the subsurface volume that is required to store enough energy to cover for a eight month energy shortage. Table [1.1](#tab:Exergy-value-efficiency) shows the exergy per unit mole of different energy storage media that are studied in this report. Exergy, [kJ/mol] is the amount of energy in a system that can be converted to mechanical work, i.e. movement or electricity. The maximum efficiency of producing each medium, , is also reported in Table [1.1](#tab:Exergy-value-efficiency). For these calculations, we need to have the density of the stored fluids at reservoir conditions, [K] and [bar]. We used the typical reservoir conditions of the chalk fields in the Danish sector of the North Sea, i.e. 70C and 200 bar. The volume of the reservoir is calculated by

where [kW] is the average electricity shortage, [s] is the period over which the electricity shortage is estimated (here 8 months), [kg/mol] is the molecular weight of the stored fluid, [kg/m] is the density of the stored fluid at reservoir condition, and [-] is the porosity of the reservoir. Assuming a reservoir thickness of 100 m, the diameter of a chalk reservoir that can store the equivalent of eight-month electricity shortage in 2050 is visualized in Fig. [1.6](#fig:Diameter-reservoir). The diameter is calculated assuming an efficiency factor of one for all the energy conversions. A 2 to 3 times larger reservoir volume is required if all the efficiency factors are included in the computations. All in all, the required volume for the energy storage is only a small fraction of the available reservoir volumes in the North Sea. Therefore, the reservoir volume is not a bottleneck in the subsurface energy storage. A reservoir with a thickness of 100 m and a radius between 100 m to 3000 m (considering the efficiency factors) can hold enough energy to compensate for 8 months of electricity shortage in Denmark in 2050.

[tab:Exergy-value-efficiency]Exergy value and the efficiency of producing different energy storage media and the thermodynamic properties at reservoir condition (70C, 200 bar); the efficiency factors are only considered for the electricity to fuel conversion.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Component | [kg/m] | [kJ/mol] | [10 m] | [-] |
| NH | 667.7 | 340 | 2.50 | 0.45 |
| CH | 386.6 | 831 | 1.66 | 0.36 |
| H | 67.7 | 236 | 4.21 | 0.7 |
| CHOH | 871.2 | 720 | 1.70 | 0.4 |
| Air | 733.5 | 22.0 | 59.89 | 1.0 |



[fig:Diameter-reservoir]Diameter of a 100 m thick chalk reservoir for the storage of fuel equivalent of 8-month electricity shortage in 2050. All the efficiency factors are assumed to be one.

In the next chapter, several energy storage solutions will be discussed, and a thermodynamic model will be used to compare these solutions. The last chapter discusses the technical opportunities and limitations of each solution.

# Chemical and physical energy storage

The oil and gas extraction from the Danish sector of the North Sea has been declining, which will lead to the cessation of production and abandonment (i.e., plugging of the wells and removal of the facilities). Simultaneously, the existing and in development offshore windmills in the North Sea will ensure the availability of abundant and cheap electricity in the region yet fail to address the intermittent nature of the wind resources. This chapter hypothesizes that the surplus electricity in the windy days and off-peak time can be converted to chemical energy (synthetic fuels, i.e. hydrogen, ammonia, methanol, or methane) forms and stored in the vast space of the abandoned oil and gas reservoirs under the North Sea. The stored energy can be extracted and consumed as carbon-neutral fuels for transportation or be converted back to electricity when there is a shortage of wind. This chapter studies the technical and thermodynamic feasibility of offshore conversion of electricity to chemical energy sources. The technical feasibility study deals with the sufficiency of the existing infrastructures including platforms, pipelines, and surface facilities to accommodate the process equipment for the conversion of electricity to chemical storable forms. Several processes including nitrogen and carbon dioxide separation from the atmosphere, electrolysis of seawater, and reduction of CO and N to synthetic fuels are simulated in Aspen Plus process simulator. The simulation results are used for the sizing of process equipment and the calculation of required platform area. The thermodynamic analysis quantifies the exergy loss during the conversion of electricity to fuel and back, and storage/extraction of chemical energy in the reservoirs based on the results of an in-house opensource dynamic model that simulates the multicomponent non-isothermal flow of fluids in the subsurface.

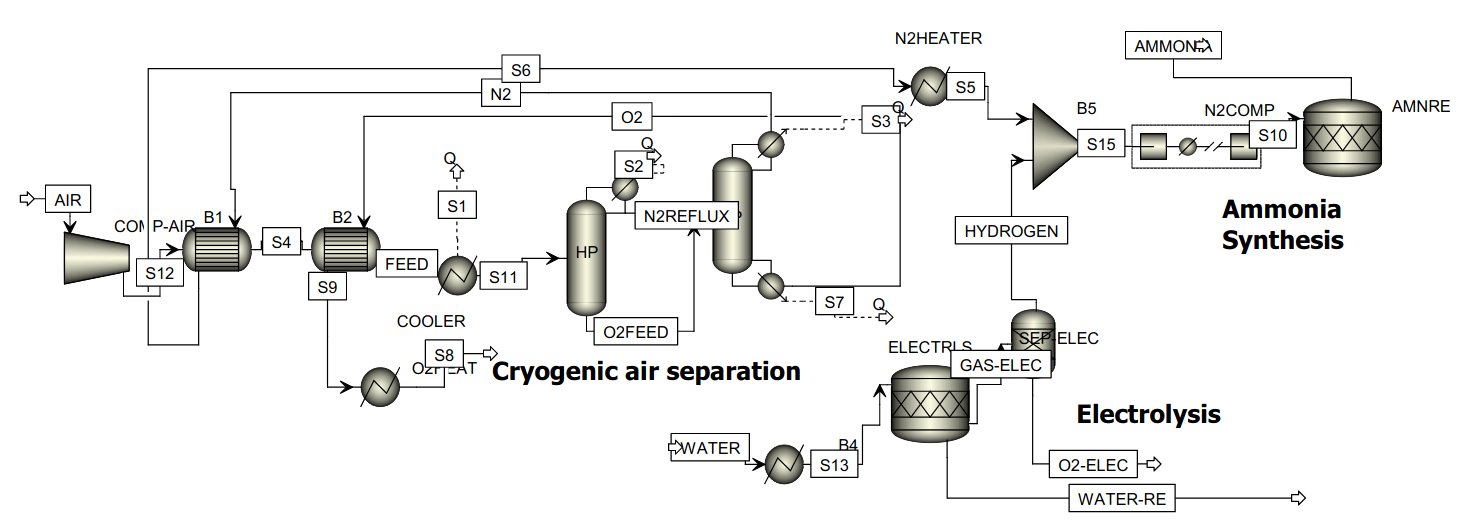
## Synthetic fuel storage

The conversion of electricity to carbon-neutral fuels, known as power2x, p2x, e-refinery, and several other names, is a topic that is extensively studied. To produce a carbon-neutral fuel, the raw material for the production of the synthetic fuels must come from the nature, i.e. atmosphere and sea water, also known as the “dead sate” in the thermodynamic literature. The dead state refers to the average composition of the atmosphere, Earth’s crust, and oceans that theoretically does not have any potential to do work. Here, we consider the production of hydrogen, ammonia, methane, and methanol. The raw material for the production of these fuels are air and seawater and the only driving force for the production processes is the surplus electricity from the windfarms. From the atmosphere, nitrogen and carbon dioxide need to be separated. From the seawater, hydrogen will be extracted via an electrolysis process. These processes are discussed in the next section.

## Atmospheric nitrogen and carbon dioxide

### Nitrogen

Nitrogen can be extracted from the air through the cryogenic distillation of air. In this process, shown in Fig. [2.1](#fig:Ammonia-synthesis-cryogenic), air is filtered, compressed, and liquefied by passing through a series of heat exchangers. The liquefied air then enters a high pressure followed by a low pressure distillation column. The separation of nitrogen from oxygen and other minor constituents of air is done based on the difference of their boiling points. Nitrogen is separated from the top side of the low pressure column. To liquefy air, a utility stream of around -200C is required, that is often provided through the sudden expansion of a compressed refrigerant. Therefore, the process is energy intensive. Different values are reported in the literature for the electricity consumption per unit mole of separated nitrogen. These values depend on the heat integration of the process. The largest value reported in the literature is around 15 kJ/mol air distilled. In our simulation, we obtained a value of 32 kJ/mol, which is perhaps due to the poor heat integration in the simplified simulations.



[fig:Ammonia-synthesis-cryogenic]Ammonia synthesis process based on electrolysis and cryogenic air separation

### Carbon dioxide

Carbon dioxide is a stable molecule that exist in a small concentration of around 40 ppm (4010 mole fraction) in the atmosphere. Theoretically, it can be separated from the atmosphere by spending an energy amount that is equal to the chemical exergy of carbon dioxide , i.e.

where [8.314 J/(mol.K)] is the universal gas constant, [K] is the dead state temperature (15C or 288.15 K in the North Sea region), and is the mole fraction of CO in the atmosphere. This gives a value of 18744 J/mol, or roughly 20000 J/mol. Based on the previous experiences in the gas industry for the separation of low concentration acid gases such as CO, SO, and HS, the efficiency of such a process is quite low and rarely exceeds 5% . This means that the energy requirement for the separation of CO from the atmosphere is around 400 kJ/mol or 9.0 MJ/kg CO. In practice, this number is around 10 MJ/kg CO which is both accurate and memorable, although larger numbers are reported for the state of the art technology .

Besides being energy-intensive, the separation of atmospheric CO (also known as air capture) has a large footprint since a large mass transfer area is needed between the air and adsorbents/absorbents; the footprint of the eqipment is between 0.5 to 2 km for capturing 1 million ton of CO per year . This means that the direct air capture equipment cannot fit on a platform.

There are other ways of providing -close to- CO-neutral carbon sources, e.g. from biomass. The captured CO from the industrial point sources, e.g. steel and cement industries or fossil fuel power plant, if the capturing and conversion to fuel is performed in a close cycle can also be carbon-neutral. However, these two sources are available onshore and it is therefore easier to utilize them as close to the source as possible.

The other source of carbon is the remaining oil and gas in the reservoirs, which can be extracted by, e.g. insitu combustion. However, this carbon source is not sustainable and we will not consider it.

## Fuels

### Hydrogen

Recent developments in the electrolysis technology has considerably increased the efficiency of hydrogen production from water. If the process is driven by the clean wind electricity, the produced hydrogen is a zero-emission fuel. Currently, hydrogen is included in all the energy scenarios for the countries in the North Sea region. For the offshore hydrogen production and storage, the following aspects need further investigations:

* Fitting the water treatment, electrolysis, and compression equipment on a platform
* Pipeline integrity (for storage and gas transport)
* Physico-bio-chemical interactions of hydrogen with the formation fluids and the chalk reservoir
* Capacity of reservoirs for storage of hydrogen and flow of hydrogen in the reservoir
* Energy efficiency and economic value of the process

In this research, the energy requirement of the process, the size of the process equipment, and the flow of hydrogen in the chalk reservoirs will be addressed.

#### Green hydrogen production

Hydrogen can be produced from the electrolysis of water in the following reaction:

The minimum energy required for this reaction is given by the change of Gibbs free energy . This reaction requires 39 kWh of electricity per kg hydrogen, but with the state of the art technology the value is closer to 48 kWh/kg .

Hydrogen is purified by cooling it down to 308 K using cooling water. It removes the moisture from the hydrogen stream. The condensed water is recycled . Some extra moisture remains in the hydrogen stream, which will be removed later in the intercoolers between the compression stages . Electricity must be provided as direct current (DC), which introduces a loss of 2.5% for AC-DC conversion . Rosen assumes an exergy efficiency of around 70% for the electrolysis of water for a mature electrolysis technology in 1995 (not considering other losses). He does not give more information on other steps of the process, e.g. water treatment and purification.

There are several technologies to produce hydrogen from water using electricity among which two are more mature and are available as commercial packages, viz. alkaline electrolysis and polymer electrolyte membrane cells (PEM) . If the electricity is supplied by renewable resources, the produced hydrogen is called “green hydrogen” . An efficiency of 60% to 70% is expected for these electrolysis processes, in which most of the energy loss is converted to heat. The energy loss during the compression of hydrogen will be calculated separately in the following sections.

The storage of hydrogen in the subsurface is a relatively old topic . Due to the high consumption of hydrogen, the petrochemical plants have been using salt caverns to store large volumes of hydrogen in the subsurface . Currently, the subsurface storage of green hydrogen is being studied by several investigators in different continents.

As this report is being written, there are several green hydrogen production projects being announced. Ørsted has announced that as part of the project H2RES, supported by The Energy Technology Development and Demonstration Programme (EUDP) under the Danish Energy Agency, a hydrogen production unit with a 2 MW capacity will be built by the end of 2021 that will produce up to 1000 kg/day of green hydrogen. These capacities, although an step forward, will not address the GW scale energy shortage that will certainly occur due to the intermittent nature of renewable electricity, as was discussed in Chapter [[chap:Problem-definition]](#chap:Problem-definition).

The other issue that needs to be addressed here is the footprint of the electrolysis equipment. We saw in Chapter [[chap:Problem-definition]](#chap:Problem-definition) that the synthetic fuel production units are expected to consume several GW of surplus electricity. The main problem with these large amounts of power is that the electrolysis units are currently designed and built in MW scale. For example, one of the largest commercial PEM electrolysis units offered by NEL hydrogen has a capacity of 25 MW and requires 3 12 m area. Therefore, a 500 MW electrolysis plant that is made of 20 PEM cells is unlikely to to fit on a platform with other equipment although it is not impossible. A better option for the offshore hydrogen production is the installation of these electrolysis cells onboard a ship designed for this purpose. Otherwise, the onshore production of hydrogen seems to be the better option.

Last but not least is the conversion of the stored hydrogen to electricity. Currently, there is no gas turbine that can work with pure hydrogen as a fuel. Therefore, the produced hydrogen must be mixed with a hydrocarbon fuel such as methane. This will cause some carbon dioxide emission unless a carbon capture process is used, which will in turn reduce the efficiency of the process. Fitting a GW scale turbine on a platform is possible but similar to electrolysis cells highly unlikely for GW capacities[[1]](#footnote-46). For example, a typical 25 MW turbine that is designed for offshore platforms and consumes a mixture of methane and hydrogen weighs approximately 250 tonnes. Therefore, up to several hundred MW of gas turbine capacity can fit on a platform. But reaching to GW capacities can be a challenge.

### Methane

Methanation process for the catalytic conversion of CO and CO to methane was first suggested by Sendersen and Sabatier . The reaction occurs in multiple steps starting with capturing of CO or from an industrial or natural source or producing a mixture of CO and CO by burning hydrocarbons (i.e. fossil fuels) or carbohydrates (i.e. biomass). In the presence of water vapor and at high temperatures, a considerable amount of CO and H are also produced. H can react with CO and CO and convert them to methane. The reduction of CO to methane by hydrogen is known as Sabatier reaction :

If the reactants, i.e. hydrogen and CO are obtained from the dead state (i.e. seawater and atmosphere) using renewable electricity, the produced methane is carbon-neutral and sustainable. The reaction can be catalyzed by nickel or ruthenium and can be conducted in a packed bed reactor. The reaction rate in different ranges of pressure and temperature are reported in the literature. Although other reactions can occur at the high temperature and pressure of the methanations reactors, it is observed that the selectivity of the reaction towards methane is high . A selectivity of close to 100% is observed for catalytic methanation of CO over nickel catalyst at a temperature close to 300C. Although theoretically the reaction reaches 100% yield at room temperature, in practice the reaction rate is too small and the methane yield is zero. A temperature of at least 200C is needed to get the catalytic reaction started. At temperatures above 500C, the reaction goes backward, i.e. conversion of methane and water to hydrogen and CO. This reaction is also known as methane reforming that is currently the main reaction for the production of the so-called “blue” hydrogen, i.e. hydrogen that is produced from a hydrocarbon. A schematic of the process for the production of green methane is shown in Fig. [2.2](#fig:methane-process). In this process, the required hydrogen and carbon dioxide are produced by the electrolysis of water and separation of atmospheric CO, respectively. The carbon source can also be provided from other alternative sources such as biomass or from the captured carbon dioxide from, e.g. cement or steel industries. However, capturing CO from the atmosphere has the benefit of making the produced methane carbon-neutral or so-called “green”. The reactor pressure is 20-70 bar and the temperature is between 473 to 673 K. The overall efficiency of the produced methane is calculated by

where [kJ/mol] denotes the chemical exergy of component , and [-] shows the exergetic efficiency of the process ; [kJ/mol methane] denotes the exergy requirement for the compression of hydrogen and CO to the pressure of the methanation reactor in a multistage compressor. Since the reaction is exothermic, we assume that the heat of reaction is sufficient to heat up the reactor to the required temperature of 673 K. By calculating the compression energy using the method described in section [[subsec:Compression-exergy]](#subsec:Compression-exergy) and replacing other efficiency factors from the previous sections, we obtain . This is much lower than the expected value of 72%. Moreover, since this process requires a large footprint for the direct atmospheric capture of CO and electrolysis of water, we do not consider it as a feasible option that can address the intermittency of the wind energy in Denmark. It is worth mentioning that this process can easily fit on a platform and if both hydrogen and CO are provided, e.g. via pipelines, operating this process on a platform is viable.

![[fig:methane-process]A block flow diagram of Sabatier process for the production of methane](data:application/pdf;base64,)

[fig:methane-process]A block flow diagram of Sabatier process for the production of methane

### Ammonia

The block flow diagram of ammonia production is shown in Fig. [2.3](#fig:Haber-process). Ammonia is produced by an exothermic catalytic reaction between nitrogen and hydrogen:

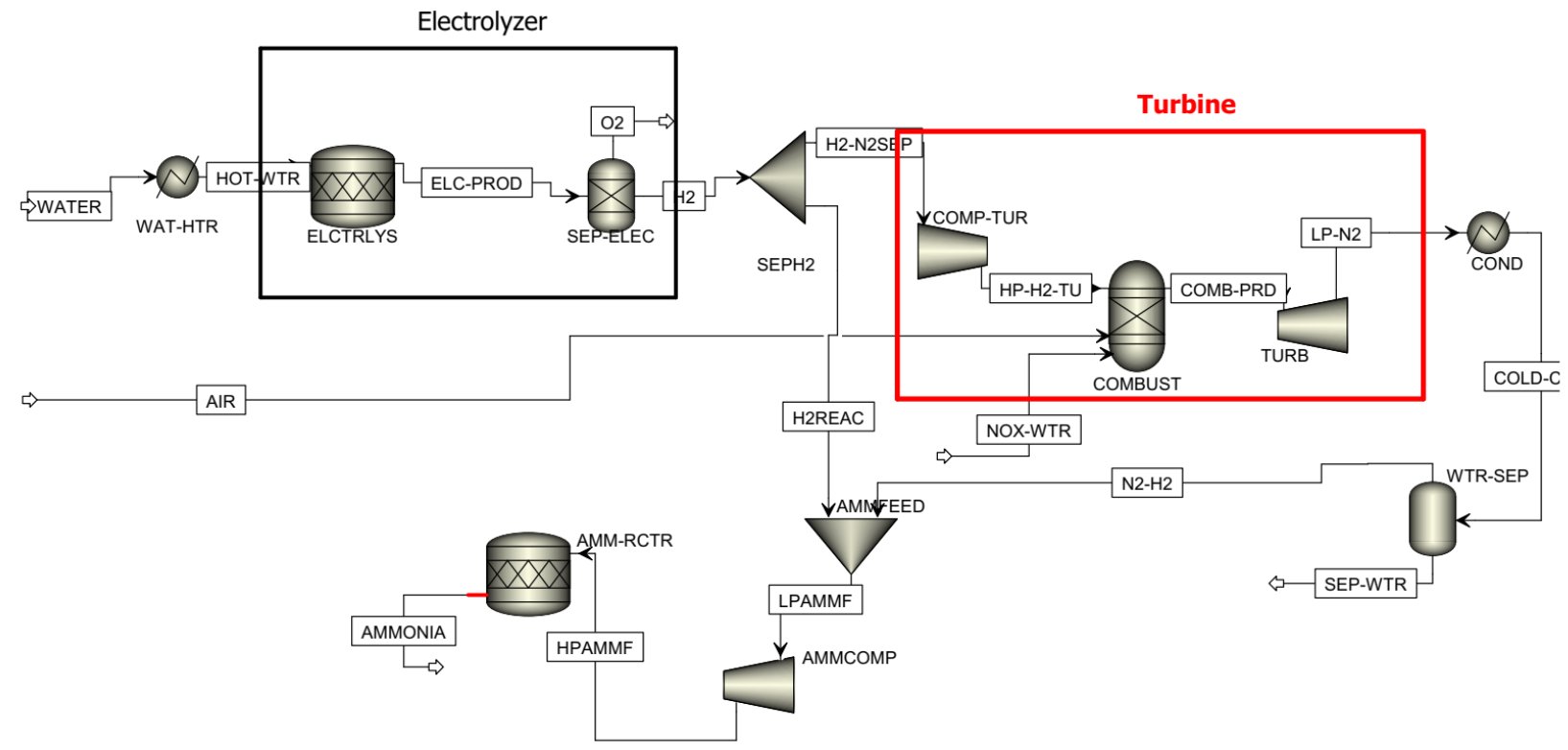
An ammonia reactor is operated at 200 bar and a temperature of 300 to 500C . The raw material for the production of ammonia, i.e. nitrogen and hydrogen, can be obtained from the air and seawater by the cryogenic air separation and electrolysis units, respectively. The nitrogen and hydrogen feed streams are compressed to 150 to 250 bar and react in a packed bed reactor at 673 to 773 K. The reaction is exothermic and therefore does not require external heating; it also produces high temperature heat that can be used in the process. The process can fit on a platform even for large scale ammonia production. However, as discussed before, the electrolysis unit for GW scale production of hydrogen does not fit on the platform. The cryogenic separation of nitrogen from air can fit on the platform; however, having long and heavy distillation columns (i.e. 60 theoretical trays) that work at very low temperatures on a platform can present several challenges for the stability of the platform and the extra room that is needed for the utilities. Therefore, we suggest an alternative design that is shown in Fig. [2.4](#fig:ammonia-new-design). In this new design, the separation of nitrogen from the atmosphere is done by a combustion reaction between the green hydrogen (produced in an electrolysis unit) and air in a gas turbine and later separating the mixture of steam and nitrogen by condensing the steam in a two phase separator. The separated nitrogen can either go to another Rankine cycle to produce some extra work or go to the ammonia reactor via a multistage compressor, where it reacts with compressed green hydrogen. The efficiency of the process is calculated by

where the factor 0.21/0.79 indicates the number of moles of hydrogen that is consumed to burn oxygen for separating it from the nitrogen in the air. The efficiency of the new process for the production of ammonia is 43% which is lower but comparable to the 50% efficiency of the same process when nitrogen is separated in a cryogenic unit (see Fig. [2.1](#fig:Ammonia-synthesis-cryogenic)). It must be noted that currently there is no gas turbine that can operate on pure hydrogen and therefore the process can only be operational in the future.

Ammonia has the highest synthesis energy efficiency among the considered fuels because of the lower energy demand of nitrogen separation and the fact that hydrogen directly reacts with nitrogen with no need for sacrificing extra molecules of hydrogen to remove the oxygen atoms as is the case when carbon dioxide is used as a reactant .

![[fig:Haber-process]Haber process for the production of ammonia](data:application/pdf;base64,)

[fig:Haber-process]Haber process for the production of ammonia



[fig:ammonia-new-design]A new design for offshore ammonia production

### Methanol

Methanol can be synthesized from the catalytic reaction of hydrogen and carbon dioxide with the following reaction:

The reactor operates at 100 bar and 264C . The reaction is exothermic and therefore the system is cooled down by circulating water that produces steam. The material streams need to be compressed to 50 to 100 bar in the reactor. Compared to methane production in which two molecules of water is produced per molecule of methane, only one molecule of water is produced during the reduction of CO to methanol. Therefore, even though the chemical exergy of methanol is lower than that of methane, the synthesis of methanol is slightly more efficient than the synthesis of methane. Similar to the methane and ammonia production, the efficiency of methanol synthesis is calculated by

which is estimated to be 40%.

The subsurface storage of methanol, however, is not advisable since methanol can be degraded by the subsurface microorganisms . Therefore, we did not include methanol in our subsurface model, although only the input component name need to be changed in the attached Matlab script to estimate the energy efficiency of the subsurface storage of methanol (excluding the microbial degradation reactions).

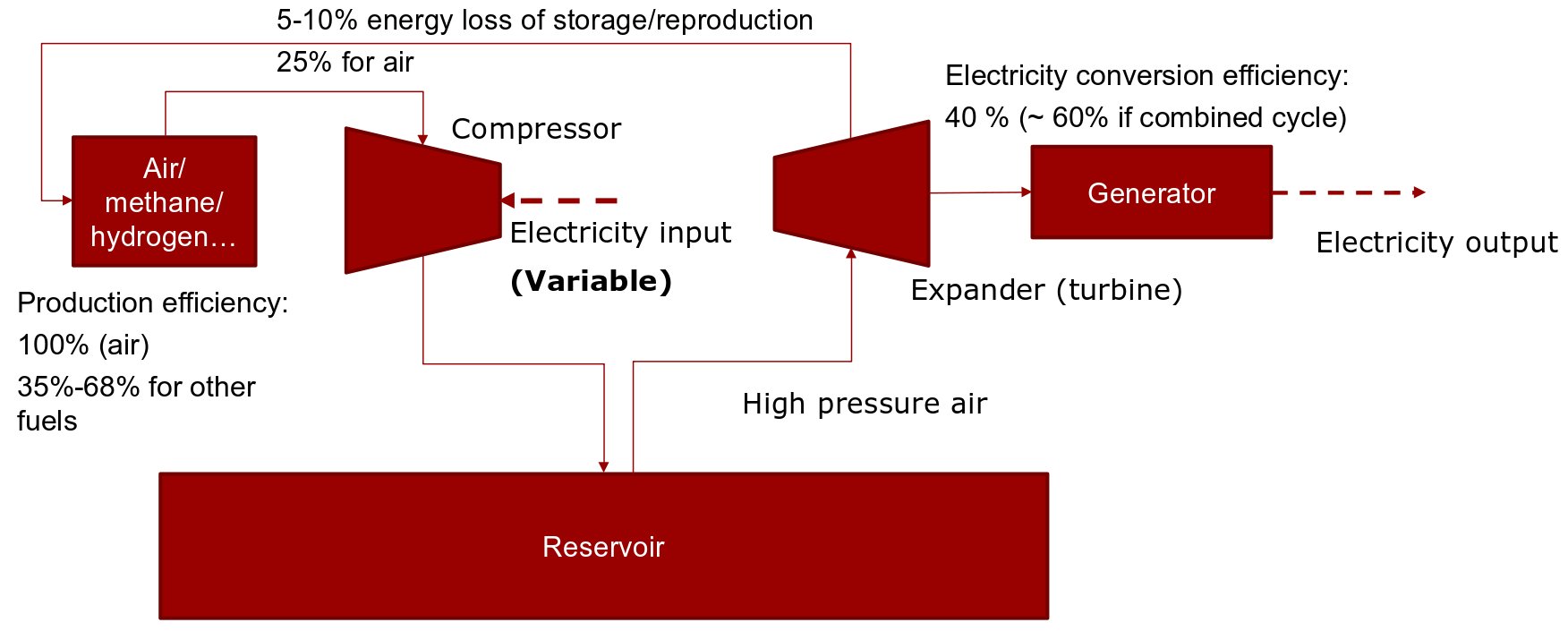
![A schematic of the methanol synthesis process](data:application/pdf;base64,)

A schematic of the methanol synthesis process

## Compressed air storage

Compressed air storage is a relatively mature technology . In the US, large tanks are used for the compression of air during the off-peak time to store cheap electricity in the form of high pressure air. The air is later used to drive a turbine and produce electricity during the peak time. This approach, although not energy efficient, is economical due to the special model of electricity pricing that encourages the consumers to shift their electricity demand to the off-peak hours. The large scale storage of electricity in the subsurface was first suggested as a method to reduce the waste energy of the large fossil fuel power plants. Many of the power plants are designed for a continuous operation and therefore their efficiency is significantly reduced if they operate under the design condition. It is not convenient to shut down the power plants when there is no consumer for the produced electricity because the start up is time consuming, expensive, and inefficient. Compressed air storage is one way of storing the surplus energy of a power plant that operates at its design condition. The large amount of stored energy can provide extra electricity during the peak time to balance the demand. The same idea can be used with the offshore windfarms, utilizing the abandoned gas fields as a storage space.

Fig. [2.5](#fig:CA-schematic) shows an schematic of the compressed air energy storage that is also similar to any other gas storage processes. Air is injected in to the reservoir through a compressor. Since the input electricity to the process is variable, the efficiency of the injection compressor will vary since it does not always operate at its design condition. The injected air (or hydrogen, methane) is produced during the electricity shortage to flow through a gas turbine that rotates a generator and produces electricity. If all the friction losses in the reservoirs and in the well are ignored, the efficiency of this process can be as high as 50% (simply multiplying the efficiency of the compressor and the gas turbine). The efficiency drops in the dynamic operation due to the variable power input and also the friction and heat losses in the reservoir. This is discussed in the next chapter.



[fig:CA-schematic]A block flow diagram of the subsurface gas storage process and the important efficiency factors

### Compression exergy[subsec:Compression-exergy]

The exergy of compressed air is calculated by

where [288.15 K] and [101325 Pa] denote the dead state temperature and pressure, respectively; [kJ/mol] and [kJ/(mol.K)] denote the enthalpy and entropy, respectively that are calculated using the software CoolProp .

The power consumption for the compression of air in a multi-stage compressor with interstage cooling is calculated in the following steps. First, the number of stages that is required to compress a gas stream from pressure to pressure is calculated by

where is the compression ratio for each compressor. The number of compressors must be an integer number. Therefore, we choose the floor of as the number of compressors. We choose a compression ratio of 3.5 here.

1. Calculate the entropy and enthalpy of the input gas stream using the physical property package CoolProp.
2. Calculate the output temperature [K] by solving the following nonlinear equation: .
3. Calculate the enthalpy of the output -compressed- gas stream
4. Calculate the isentropic compression (theoretical) work: .

The theoretical compression work can be converted to a practical value by considering the efficiency factor of the compressor, its electrical driver, and the efficiency factor for electricity transmission from the windmill, , , and respectively, i.e.,

Typical values for these efficiency factors are shown in Table [2.1](#tab:Typical-values-etta).

[tab:Typical-values-etta]Typical values for the efficiency factors of compressors, electrical drivers, and power plants

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Device | Compressor | Electrical driver | Electricity transmission |
| Efficiency factor (%) | 70 | 90 | 95 |

# Subsurface energy storage

Although there are several reservoirs that can be used for the storage of energy, we can divide them into two main groups of sandstone reservoir (e.g. Harald West) and chalk reservoirs (e.g. Halfdan). Harald West is a sandstone gas reservoir at a depth of approximately 3500 m and a temperature of 135C. The porosity of the reservoir is 0.17 with a permeability of 1 to 50 mD in different layers. The thickness of the two high permeable layers (9 and 54 mD) is approximately 100 m. The Halfdan chalk reservoir is 2000 m deep with an average porosity of 0.31 and an average permeability of 3 mD. The wells in Harald West are vertical and the chalk fields are typically producing through long horizontal wells. In the case of a the vertical wells, we assume a thickness of 100 m for the reservoir, which means that a radius of 100 to 1000 m around the well will be utilized as the fuel storage space. For the longer horizontal wells, a smaller area around the well is required for the energy storage. We assume a well diameter of 5” for all the energy storage and production wells. The geometry of the reservoir is shown in Fig. [3.1](#fig:A-cylindrical-domain).

## Problem formulation

Figure [3.1](#fig:A-cylindrical-domain) shows a gas reservoir represented as a cylindrical domain. The top and bottom of the reservoir are closed, i.e. no flow, and the outskirt of the domain can either be closed or at hydrostatic pressure. The top side of the reservoir is located at depth [m], the thickness of the reservoir is [m] and the radius of the well and the reservoir are [m] and [m] respectively. The injection rate is calculated based on the surplus electricity and the efficiency factor of the synthetic fuel (or compressed air) production. The total injection velocity is calculated by

where [kg/m] is the density of the synthetic fuel and is calculated at the bottom hole pressure and injection temperature (that is assumed to be close to the reservoir temperature). The bottom hole pressure is unknown and is calculated by trial and error between the reservoir model and the injection boundary condition that is obtained from the above equation. For the compressed air, the value of [kJ/mol] that denotes the chemical exergy of the synthetic fuel is replaced by the physical exergy of the compressed air which is again a function of the bottom hole pressure and is calculated by trial and error. The compression work for the injection of the gaseous fluid is calculated for the injection pressure of , where [Pa] is the bottom hole pressure and [Pa] is the pressure drop in the pipe that is calculated by the “pipe” unit in the software Aspen Plus.

We assume that for 2 months from 1st of October to 1st of December we only store the fluids in the subsurface (when surplus electricity is available) and after that storage period, depending on the electricity supply and demand we will have storage or production phases. The produced fluid from the reservoir is used for the supply of the electricity shortage; therefore, the withdrawal rate is determined by the electricity shortage. If the withdrawal rate is too high, the reservoir might not have enough driving force to produce the requested flow. In these situations, the bottom hole pressure becomes negative and the program produces an error. A better approach is to estimate the maximum productivity of the reservoir using an analytical solution . This approach is not currently implemented.

![[fig:A-cylindrical-domain]A cylindrical domain for the simulation of synthetic fuel storage in the subsurface](data:application/pdf;base64,)

[fig:A-cylindrical-domain]A cylindrical domain for the simulation of synthetic fuel storage in the subsurface

## Subsurface storage model

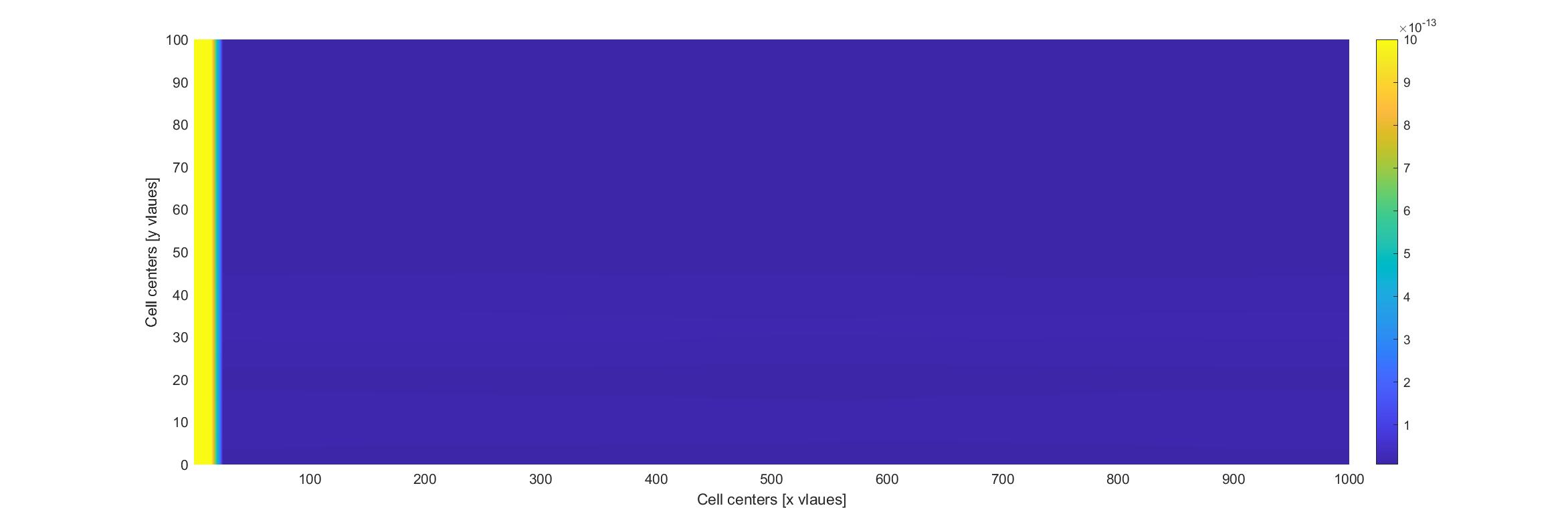
For the storage of the synthetic fuels and compressed air in the gas reservoirs, we use a single-phase multi-component flow formulation. The storage of gas in the water flooded reservoirs is not a good idea since most of the gas will be trapped by capillary forces, and therefore will be permanently stored. It is possible to dry out the reservoir and prepare it for the gas injection by, e.g. injection of superheated steam or hot gases. However, it will require large amounts of energy and can potentially create thermally-induced fractures in the reservoir. We will therefore consider only the gas reservoirs for the storage of gaseous phase energy careers. For the liquid phase, we will use both gas and oil reservoirs. In both cases, we will include the compressibility of the fluids in the model as it is a major contributing driving force in the extraction of the fluids from the reservoir.

The single phase compressible flow in porous media reads

where the Darcy velocity (assuming single phase flow and negligible gravity effect) is described by

The flow of the synthetic fuel in the subsurface is described by the advection-diffusion equation:

In the above equations, [-] denotes porosity, [m] denotes permeability, [kg/m] denotes the fluid density, [Pa] denotes the reservoir pressure, [Pa.s] denotes the fluid viscosity, [m/s] denotes the diffusivity of the synthetic fuel, and [mol/m] is the concentration of the synthetic fuel. Both viscosity and density are functions of the fuel concentration. As discussed before, the injection rate in the well is a function of the supplied electricity that is obtained by the real surplus electricity data of 2020 adjusted for 2050. The above equations are solved numerically with the finite volume method. We performed the discretizition in the free Matlab software package FVTool in a two-dimensional axisymmetric (i.e. cylindrical) coordinate. We used different permeability fields, including higher permeability near the wellbore region. A version with the possibility of adding fracture is also implemented. The permeability field that represents Harald West field with an stimulated near-well zone is shown in Fig. [3.2](#fig:Permeability-field).



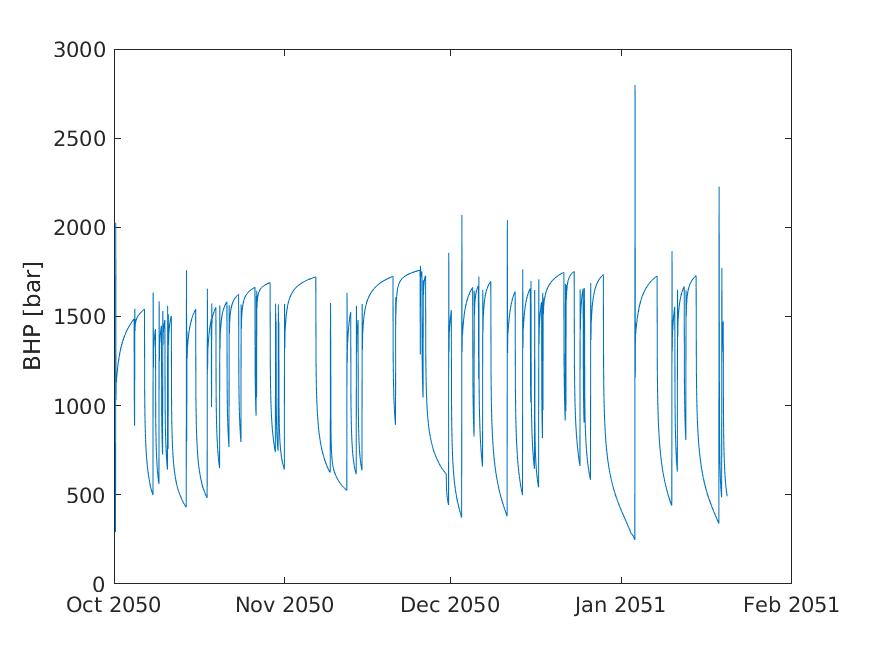
[fig:Permeability-field]Permeability field for the simulation of compressed air and ammonia injection in the Harald West reservoir; the permeability in the near-well region is 100 times higher than the average permeability of the field.

## Results and discussion

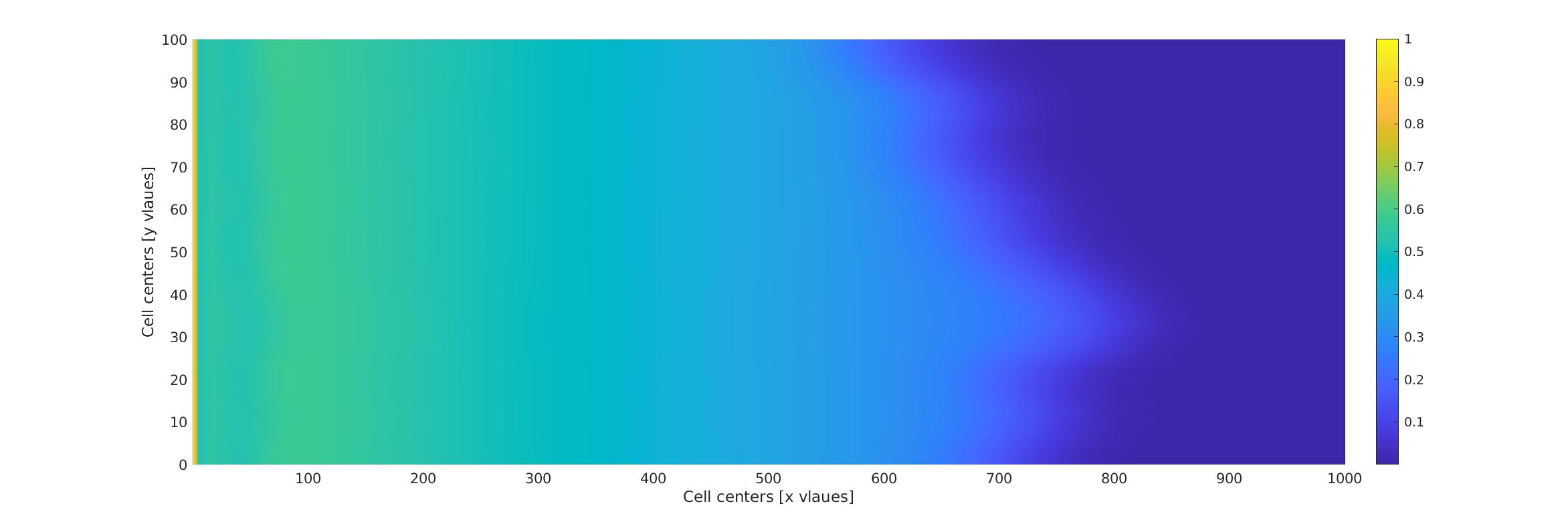
In this section, we discuss the results of the compressed air storage and ammonia storage in the Harald West field. The permeability field is as shown in Fig. [3.2](#fig:Permeability-field). A radius of 20 m around the well is stimulated to obtain a permeability 100 times higher than the average permeability of the reservoir. This stimulation is necessary for the injection of the large flow rates that are required for the storage of energy in MW to GW scales. The withdrawal from the reservoir starts on 1st of December 2050 whenever there is an electricity shortage. The production rate is adjusted such that the bottom hole pressure is high enough, i.e. it can overcome the pressure drop in the well and also generate electricity in the gas turbine on the platform. The efficiency of the turbine is similar to the efficiency of the injection compressor and does not vary with the operating condition. We assume that 20 MW of the surplus electricity is directed to the compressed air storage unit in Harald West.

### Compressed air

Fig. [3.3](#fig:Bottom-hole-pressure-CA) shows the bottom hole pressure history. We use this pressure history to calculate the average values of the produced electricity divided by the consumed surplus electricity for the injection of air over the four months of operation from October to January 2050. The analysis of the result shows that only 1.6% of the total 20 MW of consumed electricity is reproduced in the compressed air storage process, which is not significant. Moreover, the pressure increase in the reservoir is several times higher than the hydrostatic pressure and is localized is a small area close to the injection well. This large average pressure increase combined with the fast pressure increase and drop (up to 1000 bar in few days or even hours) due to the fluctuation of the surplus wind electricity can lead to geomechanical instabilities in the reservoir. Therefore, it is recommended to store smaller fractions of the available surplus electricity through a single vertical well. The tracer profile, depicted in Fig. [3.4](#fig:Tracer-profile-CA), shows that after 4 months of operation the tracer has only diffused to a radius of 700 m in the reservoir. This means that a more confined space of a salt cavern, which offers the same storage space but does not pose the problems of flow in a porous medium and can be a better storage medium if it can confine a compressed gas at several hundred bar.

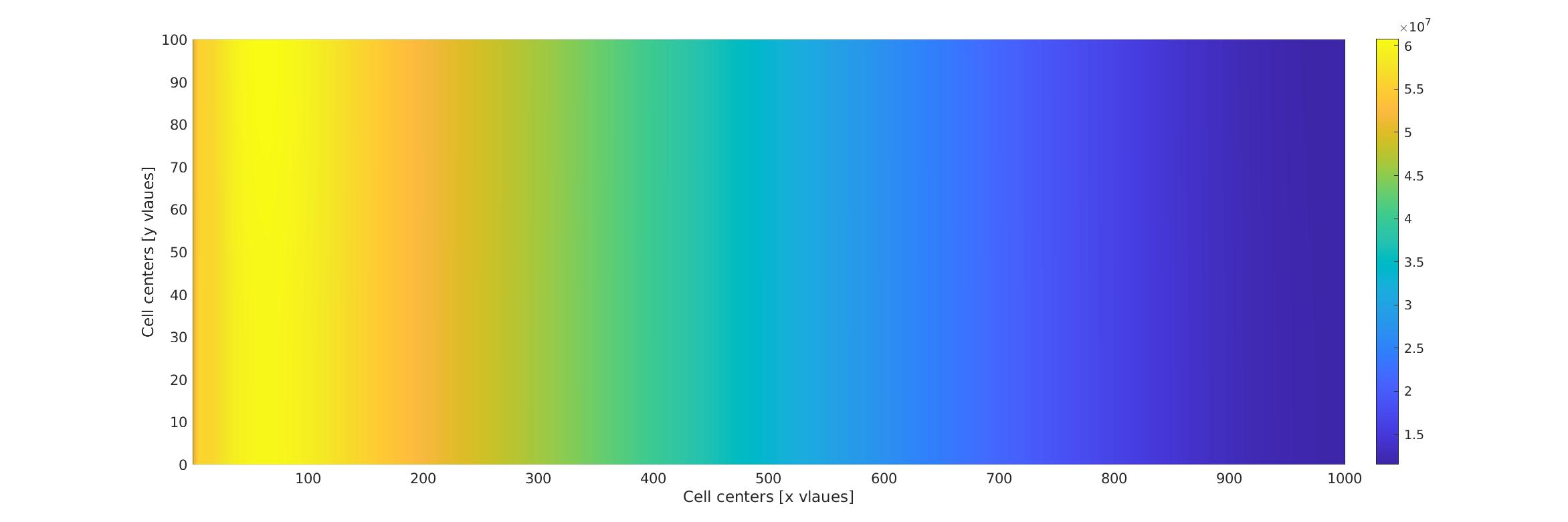


[fig:Bottom-hole-pressure-CA]Bottom hole pressure history after the injection of compressed air from October 2050 to 1st of December 2050 and storage and production onward.



[fig:Tracer-profile-CA]Tracer profile after 4 months of injection and production of compressed air in the Harald West reservoir.

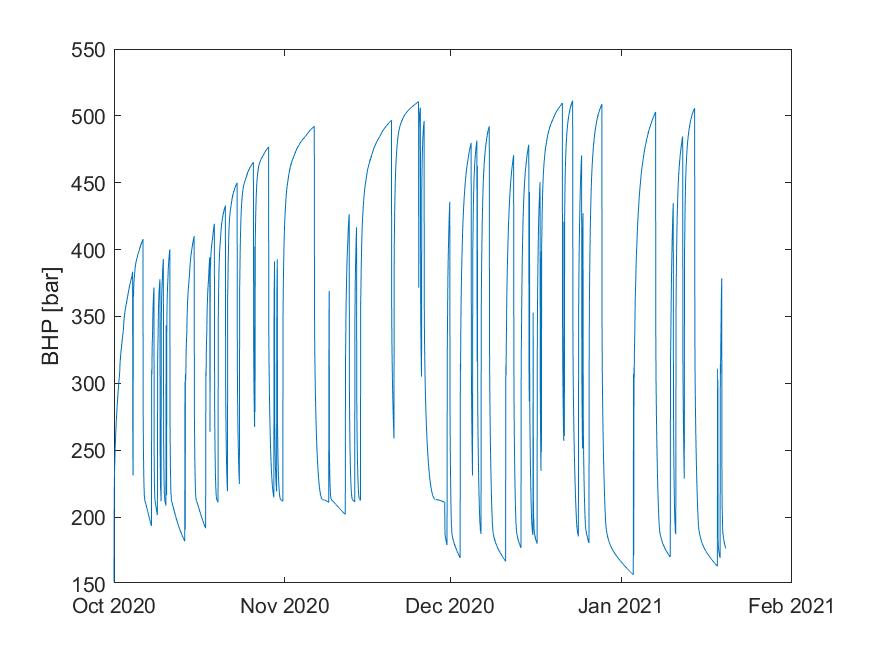
To understand the low energy recovery efficiency, we can consider the pressure profile shown in Fig. [3.5](#fig:Pressure-profile-CA). The pressure in the stimulated near well region drops relatively faster due to a high withdrawal rate. However, since the permeability of the reservoir is low, the flow from the first 100 m of the reservoir to the stimulated zone is a limiting factor even though the pressure in the reservoir is still high (more than 600 bar). An analytical model can provide a better analysis tool for the compressed air energy storage by estimating the maximum injection and withdrawal rates. The necessary routine for the calculation of pseudo-pressure (see ) is already written in the attached Matlab files and can be used for the analysis of the highest potential of a gas field for the compressed air energy storage.



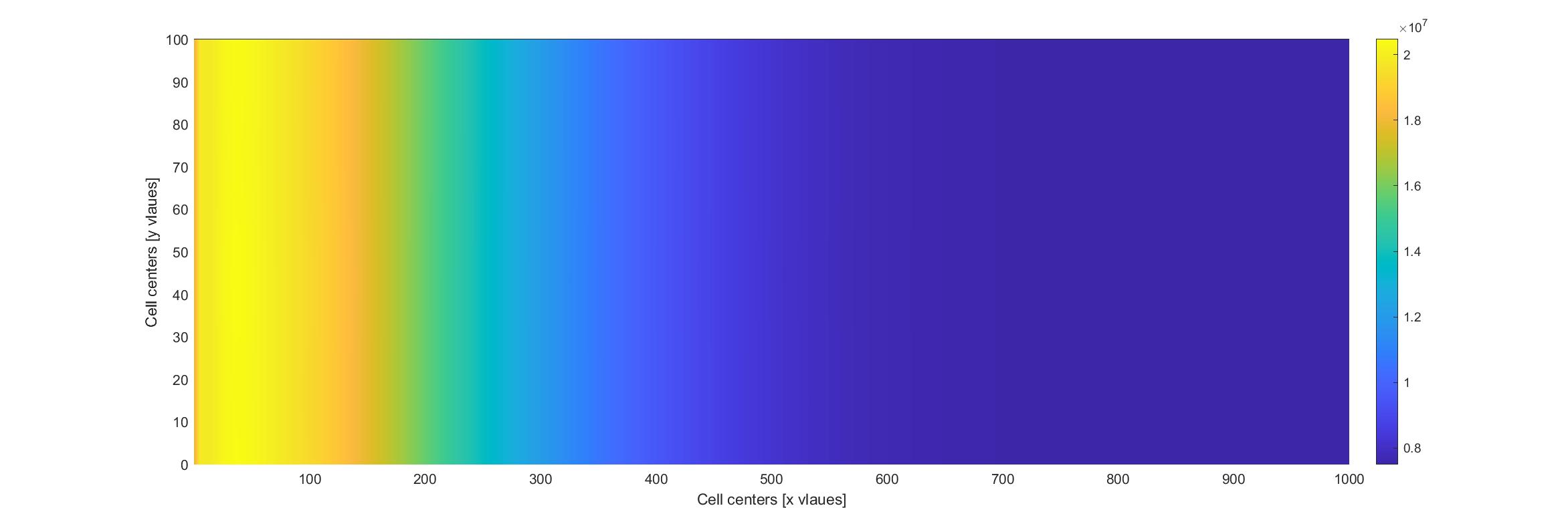
[fig:Pressure-profile-CA]Pressure profile at the end of compressed air storage/production in Harald West

### Ammonia

In the previous section, we saw that the storage of compressed air which has a limited exergy value (i.e. potential to do mechanical work) compared to synthetic fuels requires larger volumes and subsequently very high injection and withdrawal rates that leads to unrealistically large pressure gradients in the reservoir. This is a problem that can be addressed by the conversion and storage of energy in a medium with a higher exergy per unit volume such as ammonia. Here, we assume that 100 MW of the surplus electricity is provided to the ammonia production and storage unit in Harald West, which is 5 times higher than the electricity consumption in the compressed air storage unit. As can be seen in Fig. [3.6](#fig:Bottom-hole-pressure-NH3), the injection pressure in the reservoir is only 150 bar higher than the hydrostatic pressure and thus within a reasonable range. The pressure fluctuation is between 200 to 350 bar, which can create geomechanical failure in the reservoir and needs to be further investigated. Once again, the production rate is controlled by the low permeability of the reservoir as can be seen in Fig. [3.7](#fig:Pressure-profile-NH3). To avoid a negative bottom hole pressure in the simulations, we imposed a withdrawal rate limit that is 20% of the maximum injection rate during the storage phase. With this limit, the efficiency of the electricity production (assuming an efficiency of 60% for the conversion of ammonia to electricity) from the stored ammonia is only 2.3%. This is higher than the efficiency of compressed air energy storage but does not provide the 72% efficiency that is required for a feasible storage solution that can address the intermittency of renewable electricity production in the North Sea windfarms.

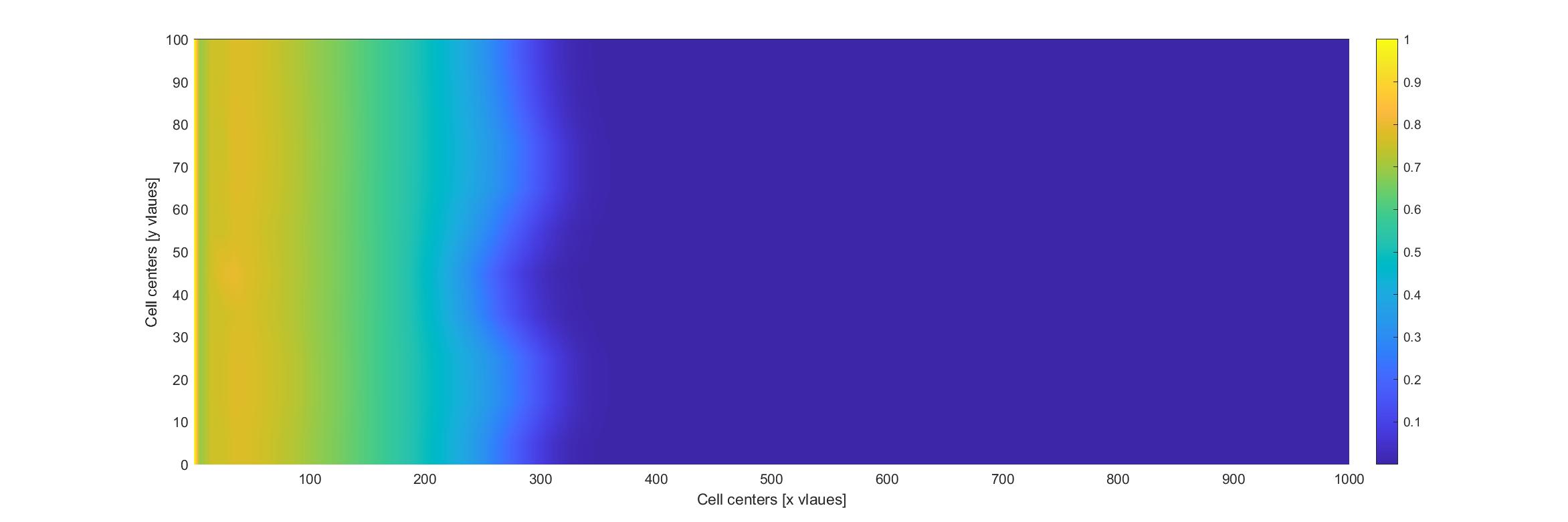


[fig:Bottom-hole-pressure-NH3]Bottom hole pressure (BHP) of the storage well in the Harald West ammonia storage facility



[fig:Pressure-profile-NH3]Pressure profile in the reservoir at the end of 4 months of ammonia injection and production

Finally, Fig. [3.8](#fig:concentration-profile-NH3) shows the normalized concentration profile of ammonia in the reservoir after four months of injection and production. Ammonia has diffused to a 300 m radius around the well. Considering only the areas with a lower pressure as non-reproducible zones and by integrating the concentration of ammonia in those zones, an initial loss of 30% can be expected for the injected ammonia. We expect that the synthetic fuel loss in the reservoir will not increase significantly and only occurs at the beginning of the storage process in which the reservoir is pressurized for the future re-production.



[fig:concentration-profile-NH3]The concentration profile of ammonia after 4 months of storage and withdrawal in the Harald West reservoir

We repeated the simulations for the injection of compressed air and synthetic fuels into a longer horizontal well; although the pressure profile is different and the pressure fluctuation is significantly reduced especially for the stimulated wells, the overall energy efficiency remains unchanged. This implies that the subsurface storage of physical and chemical energy must be performed in a confined zone, e.g. a salt cavern, instead of a large reservoir in which the fluids can spread due to the diffusive nature of flow in a porous medium.

# Conclusions and suggestions

In this report, we studied the possibility of the subsurface storage of the future surplus electricity that is produced in the North Sea wind farms in the form of physical, i.e. compressed air and chemical, i.e. synthetic fuels to address the intermittency of the renewable wind power. We showed that

1. Any potential energy storage solution must have an energy loss of less than 30%. Currently, only hydropower storage and batteries offer this efficiency, which are location dependent and only available in smaller scales, respectively. None of the studied synthetic fuels, with the possible exception of green hydrogen in certain conditions, can be produced with the required efficiency.
2. For 2050, a capacity of greater than 1000 MW electricity storage is required. The largest commercial hydrogen electrolysis units are in the order of 20 MW and have a relatively large footprint that makes them unsuitable for the offshore installations. Moreover, there is currently no hydrogen gas turbine in the market and hydrogen can only be utilized in hydrocarbon mixtures.
3. Methanol and methane require a large carbon source, e.g. CO. Air capture (the direct absorption of COfrom the atmosphere) is energy intensive and reduces the overall production efficiency of the carbon-based liquid and gaseous fuels. They also have a large footprint and do not fit on the offshore platforms. The only other option is the capture and transportation of CO from the point sources by pipelines or ships to the platforms for the production of methane and methanol. The production processes can fit easily on a platform.
4. Ammonia is the most promising fuel by a relatively high synthesis efficiency and a low footprint (since it does not require a carbon source). We introduced a new design that does not need cryogenic air separation and is more suitable for the offshore ammonia production.
5. The near-well and pipeline pressure drops limit the compressed air storage capacity to 10-20 MW through a single vertical well in the Harald West gas reservoir. Moreover, the storage is limited to high-perm sandstone or highly stimulated or fractured chalk reservoirs since very large flow rates need to pass through the reservoir that creates large pressure gradients and pressure fluctuations that can make the reservoir unstable (from a mechanical point of view).
6. Recuperation of the stored fuel with the desired flow rate is a limiting factor in all the studied cases. It reduces the efficiency of energy storage to the unfeasible values of 1-2%.
7. A confined subsurface space, e.g. a salt cavern, is a more realistic alternative to the fuel storage in the Noth sea reservoirs.

The attached simulation files offer the possibility of linking the Aspen Plus process simulation flowsheets to the subsurface storage models through a Matlab script, which can provide an automated solution for investigating more subsurface energy storage scenarios and the possible optimization of processes.

# Acknowledgment

For their valuable discussion and support, AAE would like to thank Charlotte Larsen and Charlotte Lassen and other colleagues in the program management and technology maturation team at the Danish Hydrocarbon Research and Technology Centre (DHRTC) at the Technical University of Denmark. The research that led to this report is funded by the abandonment program of the DHRTC.

1. As an example, Dan F host 6,800 tonnes of facilities and provides a power of 55 MW to the facilities. The highest point on the platform is 132 m above water. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)