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Hillesund et al.

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(54) **CONTROL SYSTEM FOR POSITIONING OF MARINE SEISMIC STREAMERS**

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 114/162, 114/163, 242, 244-246, 253
See application file for complete search history.

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* cited by examiner

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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A method of controlling a streamer positioning device (18) configured to be attached to a marine seismic streamer (12) and towed by seismic survey vessel (10) and having a wing and a wing motor for changing the orientation of the wing. The method includes the steps of: obtaining an estimated velocity of the streamer positioning device, calculating a desired change in the orientation of the wing using the estimated velocity of the streamer positioning device, and actuating the wing motor to produce the desired change in the orientation of the wing. The invention also involves an apparatus for controlling a streamer positioning device including means for obtaining an estimated velocity of the streamer positioning device, means for calculating a desired change in the orientation of the wing using the estimated velocity of the streamer positioning device, and means for actuating the wing motor to produce the desired change in the orientation of the wing.

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

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Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 09/787,723, filed as application No. PCT/IB99/01590 on Sep. 28, 1999, now Pat. No. 6,932,017.

(30) **Foreign Application Priority Data**

Jan. 10, 1998 (GB) 9821277.3

(51) **Int. Cl.**

B60P 3/10 (2006.01)

G01V 1/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** 114/344; 367/19

28 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets

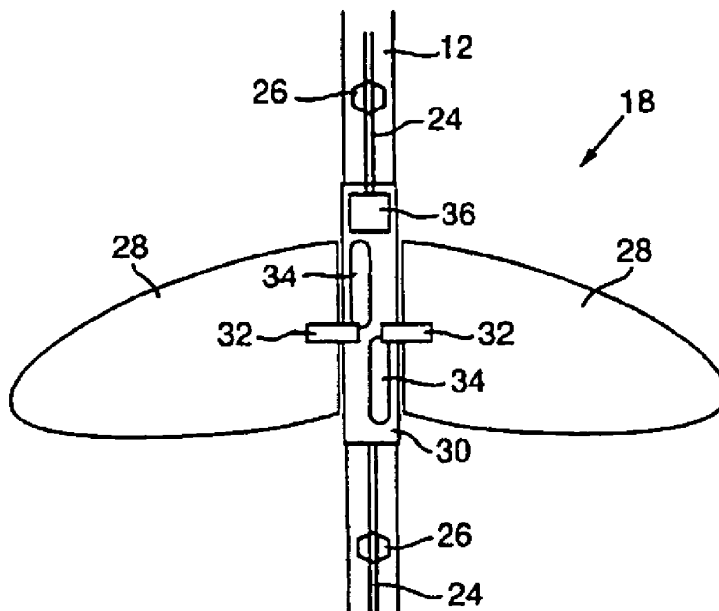


Fig. 1.

Prior Art

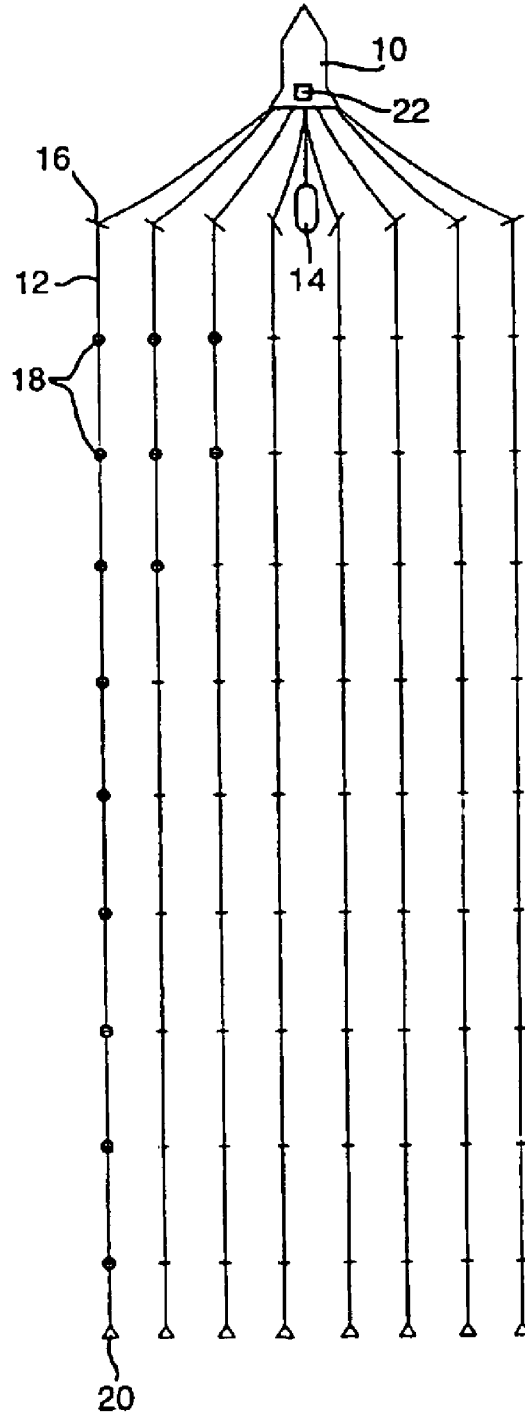


Fig.2.

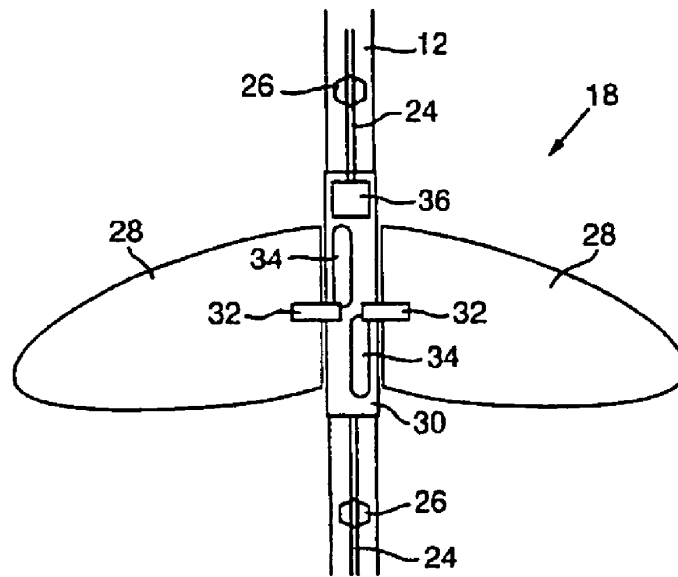
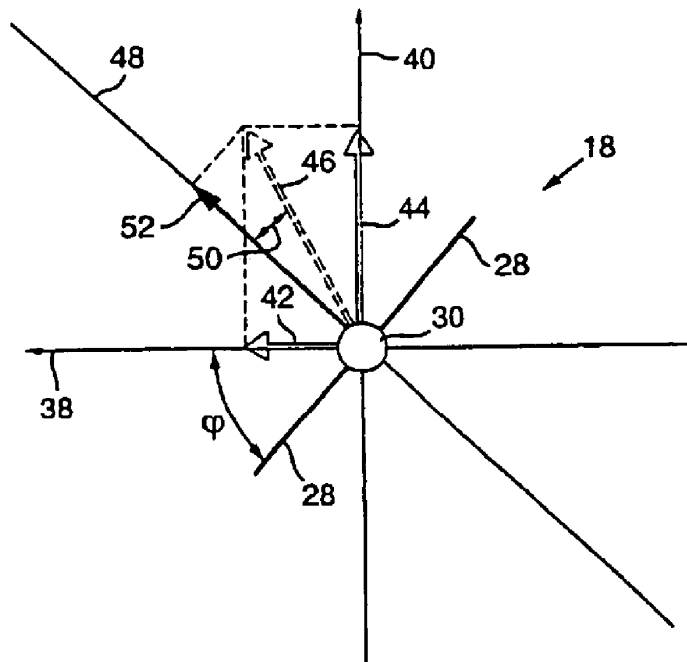
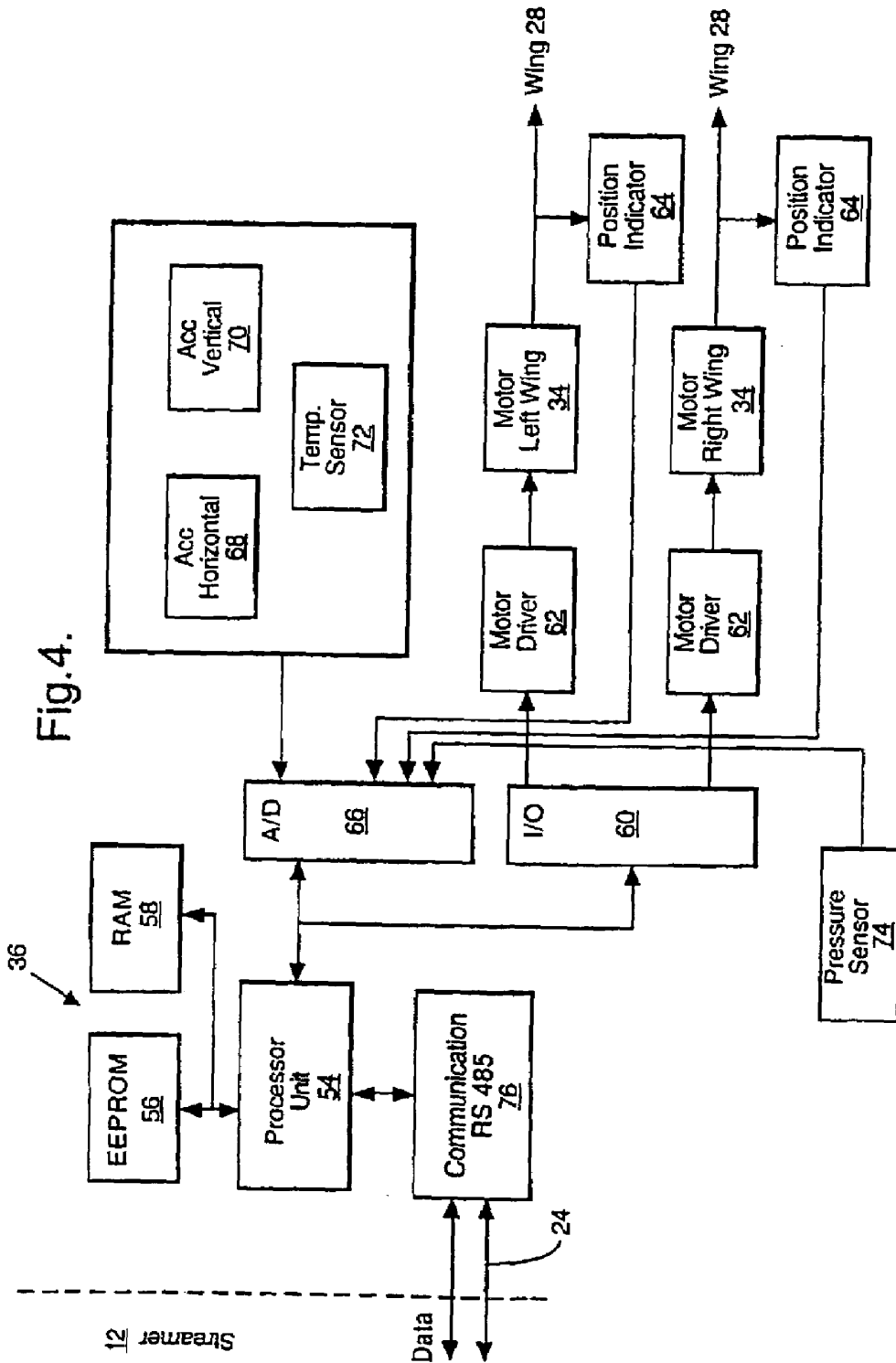


Fig.3.





CONTROL SYSTEM FOR POSITIONING OF MARINE SEISMIC STREAMERS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

Applicant claims priority under 35 U.S.C. § 120 from Ser. No. 11/070,614, filed Mar. 2, 2005, now U.S. Pat. No. 7,080,607, which was a continuation of parent application Ser. No. 09/787,723, filed Jul. 2, 2001, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,932,017, which was a 35 U.S.C. § 371 national stage filing from Patent Cooperation Treaty application number PCT/IB99/01590, filed Sep. 28, 1999, which in turn claimed priority from Great Britain patent application number 9821277.3, filed Oct. 1, 1998, from which Applicant claims foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119, all of which are incorporated herein by reference. This application is also related to application Ser. Nos. 11/454,349 and 11/455,042, both filed simultaneously herewith, which also are both incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates generally to systems for controlling seismic data acquisition equipment and particularly to a system for controlling a marine seismic streamer positioning device.

A marine seismic streamer is an elongate cable-like structure, typically up to several thousand meters long, which contains arrays of seismic sensors, known as hydrophones, and associated electronic equipment along its length, and which is used in marine seismic surveying. In order to perform a 3D marine seismic survey, a plurality of such streamers are towed at about 5 knots behind a seismic survey vessel, which also tows one or more seismic sources, typically air guns. Acoustic signals produced by the seismic sources are directed down through the water into the earth beneath, where they are reflected from the various strata. The reflected signals are received by the hydrophones, and then digitized and processed to build up a representation of the subsurface geology.

The horizontal positions of the streamers are typically controlled by a deflector, located at the front end or "head" of the streamer, and a tail buoy, located at the back end or "tail" of the streamer. These devices create tension forces on the streamer which constrain the movement of the streamer and cause it to assume a roughly linear shape. Cross currents and transient forces cause the streamer to bow and undulate, thereby introducing deviations into this desired linear shape.

The streamers are typically towed at a constant depth of approximately ten meters, in order to facilitate the removal of undesired "ghost" reflections from the surface of the water. To keep the streamers at this constant depth, control devices known as "birds", are typically attached at various points along each streamer between the deflector and the tail buoy, with the spacing between the birds generally varying between 200 and 400 meters. The birds have hydrodynamic deflecting surfaces, referred to as wings, that allow the position of the streamer to be controlled as it is towed through the water. When a bird is used for depth control purposes only, it is possible for the bird to regularly sense its depth using an integrated pressure sensor and for a local controller within the bird to adjust the wing angles to maintain the streamer near the desired depth using only a desired depth value received from a central control system.

While the majority of birds used thus far have only controlled the depth of the streamers, additional benefits can

be obtained by using properly controlled horizontally steerable birds, particularly by using the types of horizontally and vertically steerable birds disclosed in our published PCT International Application No. WO 98/28636. The benefits that can be obtained by using properly controlled horizontally steerable birds can include reducing horizontal out-of-position conditions that necessitate reacquiring seismic data in a particular area (i.e. in-fill shooting), reducing the chance of tangling adjacent streamers, and reducing the time required to turn the seismic acquisition vessel when ending one pass and beginning another pass during a 3D seismic survey.

It is estimated that horizontal out-of-position conditions reduce the efficiency of current 3D seismic survey operations by between 5 and 10%, depending on weather and current conditions. While incidents of tangling adjacent streamers are relatively rare, when they do occur they invariably result in prolonged vessel downtime. The loss of efficiency associated with turning the seismic survey vessel will depend in large part on the seismic survey layout, but typical estimates range from 5 to 10%. Simulations have concluded that properly controlled horizontally steerable birds can be expected to reduce these types of costs by approximately 30%.

One system for controlling a horizontally steerable bird, as disclosed in UK Patent GB 2093610 B, is to utilize a manually-operated central control system to transmit the magnitudes and directions of any required wing angle changes to the birds. While this method greatly simplifies the circuitry needed within the bird itself, it is virtually impossible for this type of system to closely regulate the horizontal positions of the birds because it requires manual input and supervision. This becomes a particularly significant issue when a substantial number of streamers are deployed simultaneously and the number of birds that must be controlled goes up accordingly.

Another system for controlling a horizontally steerable bird is disclosed in our published PCT International Application No. WO 98/28636. Using this type of control system, the desired horizontal positions and the actual horizontal positions are received from a remote control system and are then used by a local control system within the birds to adjust the wing angles. The actual horizontal positions of the birds may be determined every 5 to 10 seconds and there may be a 5 second delay between the taking of measurements and the determination of actual streamer positions. While this type of system allows for more automatic adjustment of the bird wing angles, the delay period and the relatively long cycle time between position measurements prevents this type of control system from rapidly and efficiently controlling the horizontal position of the bird. A more deterministic system for controlling this type of streamer positioning device is therefore desired.

It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide for an improved method and apparatus for controlling a streamer positioning device.

An advantage of the present invention is that the position of the streamer may be better controlled, thereby reducing the need for in-fill shooting, reducing the chance of streamer tangling, and reducing the time needed to turn the seismic survey vessel.

Another advantage of the present invention is that noise in marine seismic data associated with streamer position over-correction and streamer positioning errors can be significantly reduced.

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