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(71) Applicant *(for all designated States except CA FR US)*: GECO AS [NO/NO]; Schlumberger House, Solbraveien 23, N–1372 Asker (NO).

(71) Applicant *(for CA only)*: SCHLUMBERGER CANADA LIMITED [CA/CA]; 24th floor, Monenco Place, 801 6th Avenue, SW, Calgary, Alberta T2P 3W2 (CA).

(71) Applicant *(for FR only)*: SERVICES PETROLIERS SCHLUMBERGER [FR/FR]; 42, rue Saint Dominique, F–75007 Paris (FR).

(72) Inventors; and
(75) Inventors/Applicants *(for US only)*: HILLESUND, Oyvind [NO/NO]; Juterudaasen 47A, N–1312 Slependen (NO). BITTLESTON, Simon, Hastings [GB/GB]; Weathercock Hill House, Weathercock Hill, Cheivington, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP29 5GR (GB).

(74) Agent: STOOLE, Brian, David; Geco–Prakla (UK) Limited, Schlumberger House, Buckingham Gate, Gatwick, West Sussex RH6 0NZ (GB).

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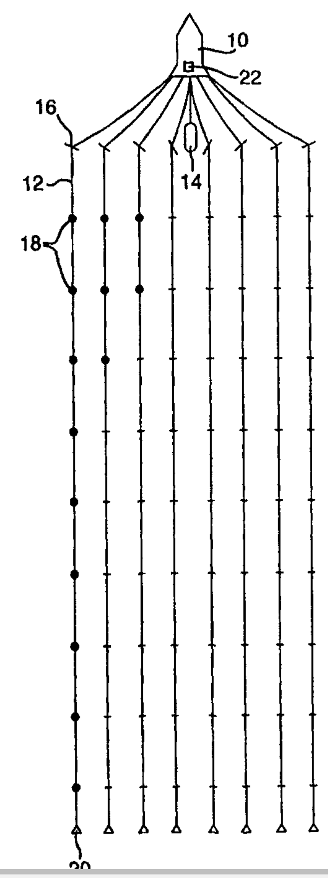
(54) Title: CONTROL SYSTEM FOR POSITIONING OF MARINE SEISMIC STREAMERS

(57) Abstract

A method of controlling a streamer positioning device (18) configured to be attached to a marine seismic streamer (12) and towed by a 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.



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CONTROL SYSTEM FOR POSITIONING OF MARINE SEISMIC STREAMERS

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

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