

Large-scale Seismically Guided Anisotropic Inversion of the Towed Streamer EM Data Acquired in the Barents Sea

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SUMMARY

This paper develops a fast and efficient large-scale anisotropic inversion technique for towed streamer electromagnetic (EM) data, which incorporates seismic constraints. The inversion algorithm is based on the 3D contraction integral equation method and utilizes a re-weighted regularized conjugate gradient technique to minimize the objective functional. We have also introduced the concept of a moving sensitivity domain for seismically guided EM inversion, originally developed for airborne EM surveys, which makes it possible to invert the entire large-scale towed streamer EM survey data while keeping the accuracy of the computation of the EM fields. The developed algorithm and software can take into account the constraints based on seismic and well-log data, and provide the inversion “guided” by these constraints. Application of this method for the interpretation of about 2000 line km of towed streamer EM data over the Barents Sea demonstrates a practical effectiveness of this approach for large-scale inversion of marine EM data.

Introduction

Development of the towed streamer EM system by PGS made it possible to acquire the EM data over very large areas rapidly and with high accuracy. In the papers by Zhdanov et al. (2014a, b) an effective method for 3D inversion of the towed streamer EM data based on the contraction integral equation method and the concept of the moving sensitivity domain was developed. The regularized inversion was implemented using the re-weighted regularized conjugate gradient (RRCG) method with adaptive regularization to minimize the objective functional (Zhdanov, 2015).

It is well known that the seismic method has higher resolution to the interfaces between different geological formations, than the EM method, while the latter has higher sensitivity to the presence of hydrocarbons (HC) in the reservoir rocks. In order to combine the advantages of both geophysical techniques, it is important for EM inversion to take into account seismic information about the geological boundaries. However, it is not necessary to impose strict constraints with fixed positions of the boundaries, which may not adequately represent the geoelectrical model. We have developed a method of “guided” inversion, which imposes soft constraints, allowing for the boundaries to be updated during the inversion process. In other words, the seismically guided inversion is still driven by EM data, but it takes into account the known seismic horizons.

We have applied the developed seismically guided EM inversion to data collected in a large-scale (approximately 2000 line kms) towed streamer EM survey, conducted in the Barents Sea in 2014.

Geological setting of the survey area

The Barents Sea was formed by two major continental collisions and subsequent separation. The first event was the Caledonian orogeny, some 400 Ma. The Caledonian fold belt runs N-S through Scandinavia and the Svalbard Archipelago and mainly influences the western part of the Barents Sea. The second collision event was the Uralian orogeny, about 240 Ma. Running from East Russia up along Novaya Zemlya, the Uralian fold belt has caused an N-S structural grain in the rocks of the eastern Barents Sea (Doré, 1994).

The most significant proportion of the HC reserves proven to date in both the Norwegian and Russian Barents Sea is contained within the strata of Jurassic age. The major discoveries in the Norwegian sector – Snøhvit, Albatross and Askeladden – all have the principal reservoir consisting of Lower – Middle Jurassic sandstone. This unit was deposited in a coastal marine setting and, where penetrated in the Hammerfest Basin, usually had very favourable reservoir properties (high porosity and permeability). Larsen et al. (1993) have estimated that about 85 % of the Norwegian Barents Sea HC resources lay within this formation. The traps that form the Norwegian Jurassic fields are generally fault-bounded positive blocks, and the HC are sealed by overlying Upper Jurassic shales (Doré, 1994).

Towed streamer EM survey in the Barents Sea

More than 10000 line-km of EM data were acquired in the Barents Sea in 2014 by the current generation of the towed streamer EM system. The towed streamer EM survey was conducted using an 800 m long bi-pole electric current source with 1500 Amperes current towed at a depth of 10 m, and the streamer cable which measured in-line electric fields with offsets from 0 to 7733 m in a frequency range from 0.2 to 9.8 Hz at a depth of 100 m from the sea surface.

In the current inversion study, we used a total of 2167 line-km of the towed streamer EM data covering the survey area of ~ 1500 sq. km (Figure 1) with offsets from 1888 to 7733 m in a frequency range from 0.2 to 3.0 Hz.

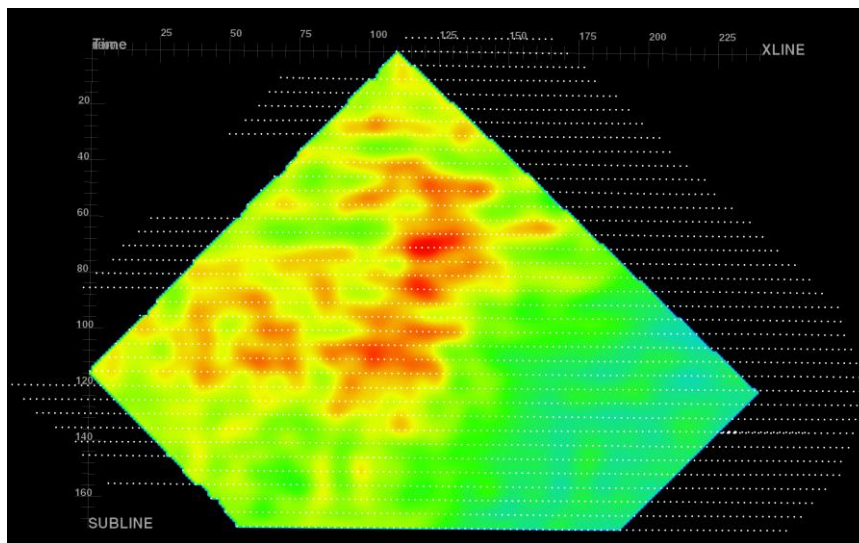


Figure 1 A shot point map of the towed streamer EM survey in the Barents Sea and a depth slice at ~700m of the horizontal resistivity of the guided inversion. The shot interval is 250 m and the line spacing is 1.25 km.

Inversion methodology and workflow

3D inversion of the towed streamer EM data is a very challenging problem because of the huge number of transmitter positions of the moving towed streamer EM system, and, correspondingly, the huge number of 3D forward and inverse problems that need to be solved for every transmitter position over the large survey area. We overcome this problem by using the moving sensitivity domain approach (Zhdanov et al., 2014a, b).

There are several important components/steps of the developed inversion method:

- 1) 1D inversions of the towed streamer EM data:
 - a. Determination of a general (variable) background geoelectrical model.
- 2) 3D unconstrained inversion of the towed streamer EM data:
 - a. Construction of the a priori model (variable background) based on 1D inversion results and known information, such as bathymetry and seawater conductivity.
 - b. 3D unconstrained inversion with variable background.
- 3) 3D constrained/guided inversion of the towed streamer EM data:
 - a. Construction of the a priori model based on 3D unconstrained inversion results and seismic data (seismic horizons).
 - b. 3D constrained/guided inversion with the constructed a priori model.

Note that, even for the case of 3D constrained/guided inversion, all resistivity values in the inversion domain are still free to change to minimize the parametric functional. In other words, the a priori model only guides the solution towards a more geologically plausible model, while maintaining a similar level of data to modeled response misfit. All inversions were performed by TechnoImaging's software package EMVision[®], which is fully parallelized and optimized on PC cluster (Zhdanov et al., 2014 a, b).

Inversion results

The dimensions of the inversion domain were selected as follows: 84 km in the x direction (parallel to the survey lines); 44 km in the y direction (perpendicular to the survey lines); 3 km in the z direction. This rectangular region was discretized into cells of 50 m x 50 m in horizontal directions, and from 12.5 m to 200 m (total 43 layers) in the vertical direction. The selected towed streamer EM data for the inversion consisted of a total 594,125 data points with 24 offsets (approximately from 1,900 m to 7,700 m) and seven frequencies (from 0.2 Hz to 3.0 Hz) along 37 survey lines (Figure 1).

Figure 2 shows an example of the vertical cross-section of 3D anisotropic geoelectrical model recovered from 3D unconstrained inversion overlain with 3D GeoStreamer[®] data. One can clearly see

a thin resistive layer in the shallow region, which may represent the source rocks of the HC in Jurassic age. For a comparison, Figure 3 shows a vertical cross-section of the geoelectrical model recovered from 2.5D inversion along the same survey line. The 2.5D inversion results were obtained using MARE2DEM (Key et al., 2014), which is a parallel adaptive finite element code for inverse modeling of marine electromagnetic geophysics. The main features recovered from the two different inversion schemes are similar, indicating that the recovered geoelectrical structures represent the sea-bottom geological formations correctly.

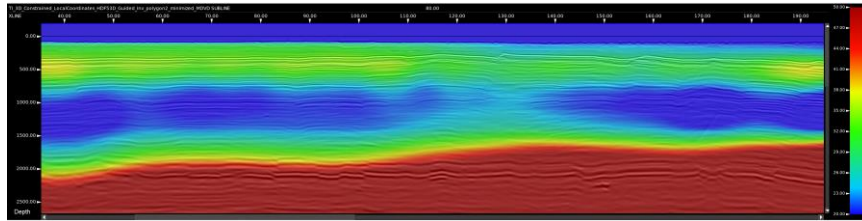


Figure 2 Vertical cross-section of the 3D vertical resistivity ($20\text{-}50\Omega\text{m}$) recovered from 3D unconstrained inversion along a survey line (subline nr. 80) overlain with 3D GeoStreamer® data.

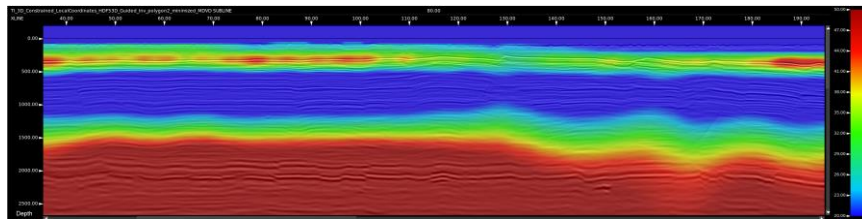


Figure 3 Vertical cross-section of the vertical resistivity ($20\text{-}50\Omega\text{m}$) recovered from 2.5D unconstrained inversion along a survey line (subline nr. 80) overlain with 3D GeoStreamer® data.

Figures 4 and 5 show an example of the vertical and horizontal cross-sections of the 3D anisotropic geoelectrical model recovered from 3D constrained/guided inversion. We used Base Cretaceous Unconformity (BCU), Base Hekkingen, and Top Stø layers interpreted from 3D GeoStreamer® data (as shown in the vertical sections by black lines), in order to construct an appropriate a priori model (a geoelectrical model recovered from 3D unconstrained inversion was used as well). One can clearly see that the recovered geoelectrical model is improved in comparison with the model recovered from the unconstrained inversion. The shallower resistive layer indicates the potential of HC in the Jurassic formation, while the deeper part of the model shows an increase in resistivity at depth.

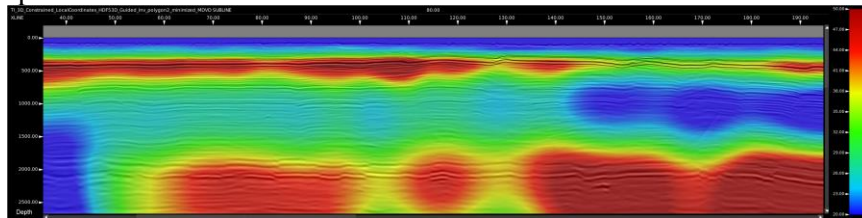


Figure 4 Vertical cross-section of the vertical resistivity ($20\text{-}50\Omega\text{m}$) recovered from 3D constrained inversion along a survey line (subline nr. 80) overlain with 3D GeoStreamer® data.

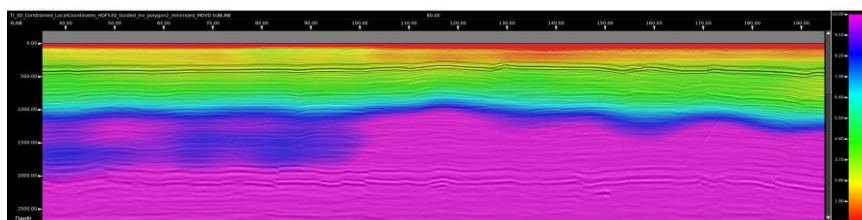


Figure 5 A vertical cross-section of the horizontal resistivity ($1\text{-}10\Omega\text{m}$) recovered from 3D constrained inversion along a survey line (subline nr. 80) overlain with 3D GeoStreamer® data.

Figure 6 shows 3D views of (a) vertical resistivity distribution, and (b) anisotropic coefficient distribution, recovered from 3D constrained/guided inversion. In these figures, the top level of the 3D volumes is 700 m below the sea surface, at a depth where the potential of HC was estimated in the Jurassic formation. Formations bearing HC, which resemble thin horizontally extended resistors, have a higher anisotropy coefficient (vertical to horizontal resistivity ratio) than the background.

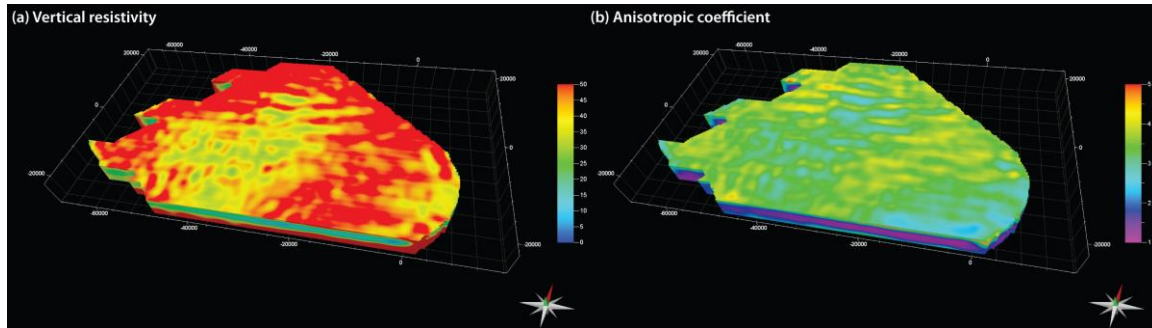


Figure 6 3D views of (a) 3D vertical resistivity, and (b) 3D anisotropic coefficient, recovered from 3D constrained/guided inversion. Top of the 3D volume corresponds to 700 m below the sea surface.

Conclusions

We have developed an approach to incorporate seismic constraints in the 3D EM inversion algorithm, based on the 3D contraction integral equation method and a concept of moving sensitivity domain. The seismically guided anisotropic inversion of the large-scale towed streamer EM survey, acquired over the Barents Sea, produced a resistivity anomaly that agreed well with the general geological structures in the survey area and other available geophysical information. The new method of seismically guided EM inversion has proven to be efficient for a large towed streamer EM dataset in a complex geological setting.

Acknowledgements

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