

United Energy (467 HK)

Expect volume growth to accelerate in 2024E

We believe the low volume growth in 2023 and the impairment of Iraq assets have been gradually digested by the market. We slash our 2024E/25E earnings forecast by 26%/28% due to lower oil & gas output and higher production cost assumptions. On the positive side, we expect the commencement of major central processing facilities in Iraq Block 9 in late Apr will boost the daily designed output capacity in Iraq's Block 9 to 100k/boed this year (currently ~75k). We estimate this should help UEG's total daily working interest volume growth to accelerate to 10%/11% in 2024E/25E, versus 0.2% in 2023. Given the capex guidance of US\$880-930mn (~HK\$6.9-7.3bn) this year, we still expect UEG to achieve positive free cash. Our TP is revised down to HK\$0.96 from HK\$1.45, as we revise down our target P/E (2024E) to 8x (previously 10x 2023), representing a 40% discount to the historical average to reflect the reduction of reserves. Our Brent price assumption in 2024E-25E is US\$87 per barrel.

- Impairment of Iraq assets affected 2P reserves. UEG made a total impairment of HK\$5.1bn in 2023 (versus HK\$828mn in 2022). Among this, one-off oil & gas reserves impairment and exploration dry well write-off amounted to ~HK\$4.4bn, mainly due to (1) the decrease in formation pressure in the main Yamama reservoir, and (2) the physical properties and connectivity of the Mishrif reservoir being less optimal than expected. This resulted in a 33% YoY decline in Iraq's 2P reserves (i.e. proven reserves + probable reserves) by end-2023
- Oil & gas output growth to accelerate in 2024E. UEG targets to achieve average daily working interest output of 101.6-113.5k barrels of oil equivalent per day (boed), implying output growth (1% to 13% YoY) this year (versus only 0.2% growth in 2023).
- Low visibility on petrochemical trading business. UEG started the petrochemical trading business in 2023, with substantial revenue contribution of HK\$3.2bn (23% of total revenue). The segment was close to breakeven at the EBIT level. We expect the segment will continue to contribute substantial revenue, but with less visibility on earnings.
- Risk factors: 1) High volatility of intra-day share price on some trading days; 2) low visibility on trading business; 3) decline in crude & gas price; 4) further impairment loss; 5) rising receivables.

Earnings Summary

(YE 31 Dec)	FY22A	FY23A	FY24E	FY25E	FY26E
Revenue (HK\$ mn)	10,754	13,591	15,707	17,570	18,964
YoY growth (%)	44.6	26.4	15.6	11.9	7.9
Adjusted net profit (HK\$ mn)	2,601.2	(1,707.4)	3,151.0	3,463.6	3,570.5
EPS (Reported) (HK\$ cents)	9.94	(6.53)	12.05	13.24	13.65
YoY growth (%)	30.3	na	na	9.9	3.1
P/E (x)	6.4	ns	5.3	4.8	4.7
P/B (x)	1.1	1.3	1.0	0.9	0.8
Yield (%)	6.3	0.0	3.8	4.1	4.3
ROE (%)	17.3	(11.9)	21.7	19.6	17.3
Net gearing (%)	1.4	(4.2)	(11.2)	(17.8)	(25.9)
Source: Company data, Bloomber	g, CMBIGM e	stimates			

BUY (Maintain)

 Target Price
 HK\$0.96

 (Previous TP
 HK\$1.45)

 Up/Downside
 50.0%

 Current Price
 HK\$0.64

China Energy

Wayne FUNG, CFA (852) 3900 0826 waynefung@cmbi.com.hk

Stock Data

Mkt Cap (HK\$ mn)	16,825.6
Avg 3 mths t/o (HK\$ mn)	174.4
52w High/Low (HK\$)	1.28/0.42
Total Issued Shares (mn)	26040.5

Source: FactSet

Shareholding Structure

Zhang Hong Wei	57.5%
Source: HKEx	

Share Performance

	Absolute	Relative
1-mth	28.0%	15.9%
3-mth	-23.8%	-35.9%
6-mth	-48.8%	-51.0%

Source: FactSet

12-mth Price Performance



Source: FactSet

Related Report:

- UEG Limited operational risk in the Middle East; Beneficiary of higher crude price -16 Oct 2023
- 2. UEG A mixed bag; volume growth is still the key 2 Apr 2023



Key highlights in 2023 results

- Loss making mainly due to impairment of Iraq assets. Oil and gas sales value in 2023 dropped 11% YoY to US\$2.2bn (~HK\$17.6bn), due to a 11% YoY decline in realized price (Crude: US\$61.3/bbl, -18% YoY; Natural gas: US\$30.9/boe; +4% YoY). Stripping out the government royalty, windfall levy & government take and trading business, net revenue of exploration & production in 2023 dropped 3% YoY to HK\$10.4bn. UEG started petrochemical trading business in 2023, with revenue contribution of HK\$3.2bn. UEG reported unexpected impairment loss on intangible asset/PP&E of HK\$2.26bn/2.83bn in 2023 (up 2.7x/12x YoY) mainly due to impairment of Iraq assets. Adjusted for these items, the pre-tax net profit would be ~HK\$3.1bn, -19% YoY. Reported net loss in 2023 was HK\$1.7bn, versus net profit of HK\$2.6bn in 2022.
- Average daily working interest production in 2023 +0.2% YoY to 100.4k boed. Iraq's Block 9/Siba achieved working interest production growth of 10%/23% YoY to 37.9k/7.4k boed in 2023. Pakistan/Egypt assets saw a 9%/4% YoY decrease in daily working interest production in 2023.
- Overall lifting cost increased more than expectation. Unit lifting expense in 2023 increased ~9% YoY to US\$4.5/boe (+12% YoY in Pakistan, +8% YoY in the Middle East & North Africa (MENA)). Given that the lifting expense was stable in 1H23, the increase in expense happened mainly in 2H23.
- Net cash position to support capex. UEG was in net cash position by end-2023. UEG guided a full-year capex target of US\$880-930mn (~HK\$6.9-7.3bn) in 2024E, up from HK\$6.9bn in 2023.

Figure 1: Change in key assumptions

		New			Old		Change		
	FY24E	FY25E	FY26E	FY24E	FY25E	FY26E	FY24E	FY25E	FY26E
Daily output (000 boed)									
Pakistan	40.0	37.0	36.0	43.5	43.0	-	-8.0%	-14.0%	-
Iraq - Block 9	51.3	66.7	76.7	57.4	80.3	-	-10.6%	-17.0%	-
Iraq - Siba	7.1	6.7	6.4	6.6	6.2	-	7.4%	7.4%	-
Egypt	11.7	11.5	11.3	11.7	11.1	-	0.4%	3.6%	-
Total	110.1	121.9	130.3	119.2	140.7	-	-7.6%	-13.4%	-
Brent price (US\$/bbl)	87	87	87	87	84	_	0.0%	3.6%	_
Realized price									
Crude (US\$/bbl)	86	86	86	86	83	-	-0.2%	3.4%	-
Natural gas (US\$/boe)	27	28	28	27	28	-	0.0%	0.0%	-
DD&A & Non-cash cost (US\$/boe)	17.6	18.5	19.2	15.5	16.2		13.1%	14.4%	-
Pakistan	12.0	12.0	12.0	9.9	9.9		21.4%	21.4%	-
Mena	20.1	20.7	21.3	18.2	18.4		10.3%	12.5%	-
Lifting cost (US\$/boe)	4.7	4.7	4.8	4.4	4.4	-	8.1%	6.9%	-
Pakistan	4.7	4.7	4.7	3.7	3.7		25.7%	26.5%	-
Mena	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.6		0.0%	0.0%	-
(HK\$ mn)									
Revenue	15,707	17,570	18,964	12,916	15,093	-	21.6%	16.4%	-
Gross profit	5,184	5,655	5,869	6,169	6,891	-	-16.0%	-17.9%	-
Gross margin	33.0%	32.2%	30.9%	47.8%	45.7%	-	-14.8	-13.5	-
Operating profit	3,953	4,277	4,382	5,300	5,884	-	-25.4%	-27.3%	-
Net profit	3,151	3,464	3,571	4,286	4,819	-	-26.5%	-28.1%	-

Source: Company data, CMBIGM estimates



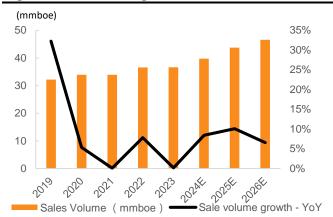
Figure 2: Key operating assumptions

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	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024E	2025E	2026E
Daily output (000 boed)	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024E	202JE	2020E
Pakistan	66.6	55.9	48.3	47.0	43.0	40.0	37.0	36.0
Iraq - Block 9	9.8	16.1	26.2	34.7	38.0	51.3	66.7	76.7
Iraq - Siba	3.5	6.6	6.0	6.1	7.4	7.1	6.7	6.4
Egypt	14.4	14.2	12.6	12.4	12.0	11.7	11.5	11.3
Total	94.3	92.8	93.1	100.2	100.4	110.1	121.9	130.3
Change (YoY)								
Pakistan	0.2%	-16.0%	-13.7%	-2.6%	-8.5%	-7.0%	-7.5%	-2.7%
Iraq - Block 9	-	64.1%	62.6%	32.5%	9.5%	35.0%	30.0%	15.0%
Iraq - Siba	-	86.4%	-8.9%	1.6%	22.5%	-5.0%	-5.0%	-5.0%
Egypt	-	-1.8%	-10.9%	-1.6%	-3.8%	-1.8%	-2.0%	-2.0%
Average	42.0%	-1.6%	0.3%	7.7%	0.2%	9.7%	10.7%	6.9%
Realized price								
Crude (US\$/bbl)	62	39	69	96	79	86	86	86
Natural gas (US\$/boe)	27	25	25	30	31	27	28	28
Change (YoY)								
Crude (US\$/bbl)	-4.4%	-37.7%	77.7%	40.4%	-18.3%	9.0%	0.3%	0.1%
Natural gas (US\$/boe)	5.3%	-8.2%	-0.8%	20.3%	3.5%	-12.6%	3.7%	0.0%
DD&A & Non-cash cost (US\$/boe)								
Total	10.0	10.3	10.8	14.0	16.0	17.6	18.5	19.2
Pakistan	9.3	9.3	9.3	11.8	12.0	12.0	12.0	12.0
Mena	9.2	11.2	11.8	15.8	18.9	20.1	20.7	21.3
Change (YoY)								
Total	19.2%	3.4%	4.9%	29.4%	14.0%	10.0%	5.4%	3.9%
Pakistan	11.6%	-0.5%	-0.2%	27.2%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
MENA	-	21.1%	6.0%	33.5%	19.9%	6.0%	3.0%	3.0%
Lifting cost (US\$/boe)			4.0		4.5	4.7	4.7	4.0
Total	4.4	4.4	4.2	4.1	4.5	4.7	4.7	4.8
Pakistan	3.5	3.1	3.9	4.1	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.7
MENA Change (YeV)	5.7	5.9	4.3	4.2	4.5	4.6	4.6	4.6
Change (YoY) Total	17.6%	-1.7%	-3.2%	-2.8%	9.1%	5.8%	0.4%	0.2%
Pakistan	-7.2%	-11.3%	-5.2 <i>%</i> 25.5%	-2.6% 4.8%	9.1% 11.5%	2.0%	0.4%	0.2%
MENA	-7.2/0	3.9%	-26.6%	-3.9%	7.7%	2.9%	0.0%	0.4%
(HK\$ mn)								
Revenue	7,104	6,204	7,437	10,754	13,591	15,707	17,570	18,964
Gross profit	3,478	2,033	3,357	5,513	4,439	5,184	5,655	5,869
Gross margin	49.0%	32.8%	45.1%	51.3%	32.7%	33.0%	32.2%	30.9%
Operating profit	2,733	1,309	2,759	3,596	(1,731)	3,953	4,277	4,382
Net profit	1,906	864	2,001	2,601	(1,707)	3,151	3,464	3,571
Change (YoY)	16.4%	-54.7%	131.5%	30.0%	n/a	n/a	9.9%	3.1%

Source: Company data, CMBIGM estimates

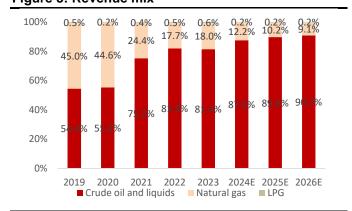


Figure 3: UEG's oil & gas sales volume



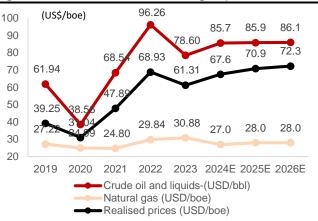
Source: Company data, CMBIGM estimates

Figure 5: Revenue mix



Source: Company data, CMBIGM estimates

Figure 4: UEG's realised oil and gas price



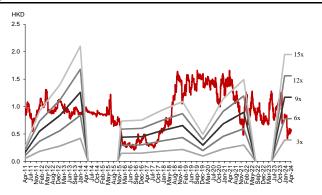
Source: Company data, CMBIGM estimates

Figure 6: UEG's unit operating cost



Source: Company data, CMBIGM estimates

Figure 7: 12M forward P/E band



Source: Company data, Bloomberg, CMBIGM estimates

Figure 9: UEG's earnings sensitivity to crude price and lifting cost (Pakistan)

		Crude price (US\$/boe)						
		77	81	86	90	94		
	5.12	2,320	2,713	3,105	3,498	3,891		
	4.88	2,343	2,736	3,128	3,521	3,913		
Lifting cost	4.65	2,366	2,759	3,151	3,544	3,936		
(Pakistan)	4.42	2,389	2,781	3,174	3,566	3,959		
	4.19	2,412	2,804	3,197	3,589	3,982		

Source: CMBIGM estimates Note: Net profit in 2024E

Figure 8: Brent crude oil price



Source: Bloomberg, CMBIGM

Figure 10: UEG's earnings sensitivity to crude price and lifting cost (MENA)

		Crude price (US\$/boe)					
		77	81	86	90	94	
	5.06	2,285	2,677	3,070	3,462	3,855	
	4.83	2,325	2,718	3,110	3,503	3,895	
Lifting cost	4.60	2,366	2,759	3,151	3,544	3,936	
(Mena)	4.37	2,407	2,799	3,192	3,584	3,977	
	4.14	2,447	2,840	3,232	3,625	4,017	

Source: CMBIGM estimates Note 1: Net profit in 2024E

Note 2: Mena = Middle East & North Africa



Financial Summary

•						
INCOME STATEMENT	2021A	2022A	2023A	2024E	2025E	2026E
YE 31 Dec (HK\$ mn)						
Revenue	7,437	10,754	13,591	15,707	17,570	18,964
Cost of goods sold	(4,080)	(5,241)	(9,152)	(10,523)	(11,915)	(13,095)
Gross profit	3,357	5,513	4,439	5,184	5,655	5,869
Admin expense	(574)	(524)	(676)	(785)	(878)	(948)
Others	(25)	(1,393)	(5,494)	(446)	(499)	(539)
Operating profit	2,759	3,596	(1,731)	3,953	4,277	4,382
Share of (losses)/profits of associates/JV	(59)	(187)	4	(50)	(43)	(42)
EBITDA	5,731	7,813	3,117	9,641	10,558	11,488
Depreciation	2,972	4,218	4,848	5,688	6,281	7,106
Interest expense	(267)	(388)	(294)	(239)	(206)	(189)
Pre-tax profit	2,433	3,021	(2,020)	3,664	4,028	4,152
Income tax	(432)	(420)	313	(513)	(564)	(581)
Minority interest	0	0	0	(0)	(0)	(0)
Net profit	2,001	2,601	(1,707)	3,151	3,464	3,571
Adjusted net profit	2,001	2,601	(1,707)	3,151	3,464	3,571
Gross dividends	1,052	1,052	0	630	693	714
BALANCE SHEET	2021A	2022A	2023A	2024E	2025E	2026E
YE 31 Dec (HK\$ mn)						
Current assets	7,669	10,005	11,659	13,981	16,531	19,903
Cash & equivalents	3,171	3,255	3,327	4,212	5,607	7,716
Account receivables	4,145	6,316	8,048	9,424	10,542	11,758
Inventories	287	389	253	314	351	398
Financial assets at FVTPL	12	9	9	9	9	9
Other current assets	53	36	22	22	22	22
Non-current assets	17,364	17,415	14,170	15,830	16,937	17,175
PP&E	10,835	11,739	11,224	13,277	14,773	15,406
Deferred income tax	1	23	437	437	437	437
Investment in JVs & assos	475	395	280	230	187	145
Intangibles	5,340	4,324	1,619	1,277	930	578
Goodwill	0	0	0	0	0	0
Financial assets at FVTPL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other non-current assets	713	933	610	610	610	610
Total assets	25,032	27,420	25,829	29,812	33,468	37,078
Current liabilities	5,093	7,974	8,987	9,959	10,836	11,666
Short-term borrowings	1,761	1,886	306	239	219	200
Account payables	2,818	4,774	6,644	7,682	8,579	9,428
Other current liabilities	515	1,315	2,038	2,038	2,038	2,038
Non-current liabilities	5,699	3,638	4,006	3,672	3,492	3,313
Long-term borrowings	2,833	1,586	2,488	2,155	1,975	1,796
Other non-current liabilities	2,865	2,051	1,518	1,518	1,518	1,518
Total liabilities	10,792	11,612	12,993	13,631	14,328	14,979
Share capital	263	263	260	260	260	260
Retained earnings	13,971	15,539	12,570	15,915	18,874	21,837
Total shareholders equity	14,234	15,802	12,831	16,175	19,134	22,098
Minority interest	6	6	5	5	5	5
Total equity and liabilities	25,032	27,420	25,829	29,812	33,468	37,082



CASH FLOW	2021A	2022A	2023A	2024E	2025E	2026E
YE 31 Dec (HK\$ mn)						
Operating						
Profit before taxation	2,001	2,601	(1,707)	3,151	3,464	3,571
Depreciation & amortization	2,972	4,218	4,848	5,688	6,281	7,106
Change in working capital	(1,032)	(587)	672	(399)	(258)	(413)
Others	340	1,593	3,514	50	43	42
Net cash from operations	4,281	7,825	7,327	8,490	9,530	10,305
Investing						
Capital expenditure	(2,729)	(5,392)	(6,670)	(7,205)	(7,305)	(7,305)
Acquisition of subsidiaries/ investments	(10)	108	(120)	0	0	0
Others	245	(422)	246	0	0	0
Net cash from investing	(2,494)	(5,707)	(6,543)	(7,205)	(7,305)	(7,305)
Financing						
Dividend paid	(620)	(1,052)	(1,052)	0	(630)	(693)
Net borrowings	(642)	(1,122)	(678)	(400)	(200)	(199)
Others	(190)	103	1,092	0	0	0
Net cash from financing	(1,452)	(2,070)	(638)	(400)	(830)	(892)
Net change in cash						
Cash at the beginning of the year	3,093	3,171	3,255	3,327	4,212	5,607
Exchange difference	(258)	36	(73)	0	0	0
Others	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cash at the end of the year	3,171	3,255	3,327	4,212	5,607	7,716
GROWTH	2021A	2022A	2023A	2024E	2025E	2026E
YE 31 Dec						
Revenue	19.9%	44.6%	26.4%	15.6%	11.9%	7.9%
Gross profit	65.2%	64.2%	(19.5%)	16.8%	9.1%	3.8%
Operating profit	110.8%	30.3%	na	na	8.2%	2.5%
EBITDA	38.3%	36.3%	(60.1%)	209.3%	9.5%	8.8%
Net profit	131.5%	30.0%	na	na	9.9%	3.1%
Adj. net profit	131.5%	30.0%	na	na	9.9%	3.1%
PROFITABILITY	2021A	2022A	2023A	2024E	2025E	2026E
YE 31 Dec	45.40/	E4 00/	20.70/	22.00/	20.00/	20.00/
Gross profit margin	45.1% 37.1%	51.3%	32.7%	33.0% 25.2%	32.2%	30.9% 23.1%
Operating margin EBITDA margin	37.1% 77.1%	33.4% 72.7%	(12.7%) 22.9%	25.2% 61.4%	24.3% 60.1%	60.6%
Adj. net profit margin	26.9%	24.2%	(12.6%)	20.1%	19.7%	18.8%
Return on equity (ROE)	14.7%	17.3%	(11.9%)	21.7%	19.6%	17.3%
GEARING/LIQUIDITY/ACTIVITIES	2021A	2022A	2023A	2024E	2025E	2026E
YE 31 Dec			_0_0/			
Net debt to equity (x)	0.1	0.0	(0.0)	(0.1)	(0.2)	(0.3)
Current ratio (x)	1.5	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.7
Receivable turnover days	203.4	214.4	216.1	219.0	219.0	226.3
Inventory turnover days	25.7	27.1	10.1	10.9	10.8	11.1
Payable turnover days	252.1	332.5	265.0	265.0	265.0	260.0
VALUATION	2021A	2022A	2023A	2024E	2025E	2026E
YE 31 Dec						
P/E	8.4	6.4	ns	5.3	4.8	4.7
P/B	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.0	0.9	0.8
Div yield (%)	6.3	6.3	0.0	3.8	4.1	4.3

Source: Company data, CMBIGM estimates. Note: The calculation of net cash includes financial assets.



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CMBIGM Ratings

: Stock with potential return of over 15% over next 12 months BUY HOLD Stock with potential return of +15% to -10% over next 12 months SELL NOT RATED : Stock with potential loss of over 10% over next 12 months

: Stock is not rated by CMBIGM

OUTPERFORM : Industry expected to outperform the relevant broad market benchmark over next 12 months MARKET-PERFORM : Industry expected to perform in-line with the relevant broad market benchmark over next 12 months UNDERPERFORM : Industry expected to underperform the relevant broad market benchmark over next 12 months

CMB International Global Markets Limited

Address: 45/F, Champion Tower, 3 Garden Road, Hong Kong, Tel: (852) 3900 0888 Fax: (852) 3900 0800

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