

Gas find may make Brazil self-sufficient

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January 23, 2008 - 8:02AM

The discovery of a huge natural gas reserve off the coast of Rio de Janeiro could make Latin America's largest country self-sufficient in that fuel, a top official for Brazil's state oil company said on Tuesday.

The discovery of the reserve located about 5,100 metres below the surface of the Atlantic Ocean was announced late Monday by Petroleo Brasileiro SA, or Petrobras.

"If this field has the gas that Petrobras believes it has, it will make Brazil self-sufficient in natural gas," Guilherme Estrella, the company's production and exploration director said at a news conference. "If it meets our expectations ... it could supply Brazil's demands."

He said it would take Petrobras at least two years to determine if the new find is commercially viable. If so, production probably would not begin before 2014.

According to Estrella, the new find could substantially boost Brazil's bargaining power with Bolivia, which currently supplies about half of the natural gas consumed in Brazil.