

SPARK STUDIO · NEUQUÉN, ARGENTINA

Landing in Vaca Muerta

A practical guide for foreign companies and technology brands: the market, setup, taxes, local-content rules, payment terms and how to choose a local partner.

Edition October 2026 · sparkstudio.ar/vaca-muerta · hola@sparkstudio.ar · +54 9 299 504-0806
General information, not legal or tax advice for a specific case.

1. Why now

Vaca Muerta produced around 643,000 barrels of oil per day in July 2026, up 26% year on year, and Neuquén broke production records through 2026. Argentina's large-investment regime (RIGI) had approved 23 projects worth about USD 50 billion by September 2026, several of them in the basin: the VMOS export pipeline, Rincón de Aranda and Los Toldos II Este, among others.

The opportunity is real. What makes foreign companies stumble is rarely technical: it is costs, payment terms, provincial taxes, local-content rules and how the local operation is staffed.

Sources: Secretaría de Energía (July 2026); iProfesional, RIGI projects (Sept 2026).

2. Ways to enter

Option	When it fits	Watch out for
Local representative or partner	Testing the market, selling equipment or technology with recurring service	Choose a partner with field capacity, not only commercial contacts
Branch (art. 118, Companies Law)	Projects or contracts in your own name	Annual statements within 120 days of year end; branch taxation
Local company (SA, SRL, SAS)	Long-term operation, hiring, Compre Neuquino scoring	Directors' residence rules, more corporate maintenance
Joint venture (UTE) with a certified local firm	Bidding with operators that must prefer local suppliers	Local partner must hold at least 51% of profits to count as Neuquén supplier

In May 2026 the Buenos Aires registry (IGJ) removed about two thirds of the requirements for foreign companies and accepts digital apostilles, which shortens the paperwork.

3. Typical timelines

Step	Typical time
Documents and powers of attorney ready to sign	2–3 business days
Company or branch registered, from complete documentation	10–30 business days
Tax registration (ARCA, Neuquén turnover tax)	about 5 business days
Bank account and first invoice	depends on the bank's compliance review

Timelines depend on the registry and on documents arriving complete and apostilled.

4. Taxes you meet first

FEDERAL

- Income tax (Ganancias): 25% under RIGI; the general corporate scale otherwise.
- VAT (IVA) 21% general rate, with withholding regimes from large customers.
- Social security contributions on payroll; ART (work-risk insurance) is mandatory for every employer.

PROVINCIAL: INGRESOS BRUTOS

A tax on gross revenue. Oil and gas services in Neuquén were taxed at 3.5% in 2024, with surcharges by size in 2025; 2026 rates are set by Law 3541. If you invoice in several provinces, the **Convenio Multilateral** splits the tax base among them, usually by the average of revenue and expenses in each.

Withholdings and perceptions start with the first invoice and sit as credits. Budget them as cash, not as tax: they are one of the main reasons a profitable contract runs short of cash.

5. Compre Neuquino (Law 3338)

Operators and large service companies must prefer certified Neuquén suppliers and pass the obligation to their contractors. A certified supplier wins if its price is within 9% or 6% of a non-certified one, depending on its tier, and at least 60% of each purchasing category must go to certified suppliers. Certification (Centro PyME-ADENEU) weighs local capital, local headquarters, local employment and the share of the tax base in Neuquén.

What it means for you: alone, a foreign company rarely scores. Partner with a certified firm, form a UTE, or build a local subsidiary with base and staff in Neuquén.

6. Rules that create demand

Methane. Resolution 258/2025 and Disposition 1/2026 made greenhouse gas reporting mandatory for all upstream operators, with a leak detection and repair program, rising quantification levels to 2030 and external verification. Only one site in the basin had continuous fixed monitoring publicly reported in 2026.

Pipeline integrity. Gas pipelines follow ENARGAS standard NAG-100, which requires inspecting cathodic protection rectifiers six times a year; a draft amendment introduces real-time monitoring for higher-pressure operation.

RIGI. Approved projects have investment committed for years: they are the customers to map first.

7. Cash, payment terms and FX

- Operators commonly pay at 60 to 90 days or more after invoice approval. Model cash with real terms, not contract terms.
- Since April 2025, dividends can be remitted abroad on profits from fiscal years starting on or after 1 January 2025 (Central Bank Communication A 8226); earlier profits remain restricted. Companies remitted more than USD 4 billion between January and September 2026.
- Decide the invoicing currency and how money moves in and out before the first invoice.

8. People

Field workers in oil and gas are mostly under the collective agreements of the Sindicato de Petróleo y Gas Privado de Río Negro, Neuquén y La Pampa. Housing, transport and salaries in the basin cost far more than in Buenos Aires; budget them locally. Hiring a single local manager as the whole operation concentrates all the risk in one person.

9. Choosing a local partner: a checklist

- Do they have field capacity (installation, commissioning, first-line support), or only contacts?
- Can they handle tax, invoicing and collections, or will you need a second firm?
- Do they report to headquarters in English, monthly, with numbers you can audit?
- Do they help you with Compre Neuquino and vendor registration with operators?
- Is their compensation tied to your revenue (commission, recurring share) rather than fixed fees only?

About Spark Studio. A Neuquén firm led by CPA Chinni Ignacio, CEO of Efectivamente for more than 18 years and responsible for the Argentine market entry of Total Safety, a US industrial safety company. We act as local partner for companies and technology brands: commercial representation, field installation with our own field partner, tax and collections, and reporting to headquarters.

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Main sources: Foreign Ministry RIGI summary; Decree 105/26; Neuquén Law 3338; Neuquén tax laws 3407 and 3541; Marval, Disposition 1/2026; ENARGAS NAG-100; Central Bank Comm. A 8226; DolarHoy (Oct 2026); Universidad de Palermo on IGJ RG 4/2026.