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Norway's Integrated Ocean Management (IOM) Policies and Plans - A Brief Presentation

Any presentation or discussion of Norway's integrated ocean management policies must take into consideration the country's dependence on the sustainable use of the oceans. To the south of the Svalbard archipelago, the Norwegian mainland consists (basically) of a two and a half thousand kilometer long rocky outcrop, jutting into the Arctic Ocean. The arctic waters that adjoin Norway's coasts contain vast natural resources – renewable and non-renewable – which form the backbone of the country's economy – the basis of its livelihood and welfare.

Sustainable management

In 1987 the World Commission on Environment and Development – also known as the Brundtland Commission – submitted a report called “Our Common Future”. This document introduced the term “Sustainable Development”, defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The term “Sustainable Development” was subsequently to become a mantra in world politics – it has gained almost universal acceptance as the guiding principle for the management of natural resources.

The sustainable development agenda includes the twin concepts of *environment conservation* and *resource management* – these are actually two aspects of the same issue. Modern management principles include using the best scientific advice and incorporate the *ecosystems approach*.

Among renewable resources, the marine living resources play a particularly important rôle as the basis of the fishing industry. *Sustainable use* is the main objective of Norwegian fisheries management policies. Thus, for Norway “management of marine living resources” means sustainable management of fisheries in the broad sense – including not only catching fish but also the harvesting of crustaceans (shrimps etc.) and marine mammals (whales and seals). It also means taking into account the effects of fishery management measures on the ecosystem as a whole, as well as monitoring (including regulating) external activities that may affect the management of marine living resources.

The High North

Long-term conservation and sustainable use based on scientific knowledge and an ecosystem-based approach are key principles of management of natural resources globally. They apply equally to any geographical region or sub-region of the oceans of the world. The Arctic region, including the areas which in Norwegian political vernacular are known as "Nordområdene" or "The High North", are no exception in this regard. Thus, there is nothing unique or special about the Arctic that would call for a substantially different or novel approach to dealing with the issue of sustainable management of marine living resources in the Arctic.¹

There are, however, other considerations – including environmental issues - that are important to take into account, and which mutually affect resource management tasks and challenges – especially with regard to the coastal waters and the high seas of the High North.

The main part of European arctic waters – the Barents Sea and the Norwegian Sea – contains vast natural resources, - renewable and non-renewable. Among these are some of the world's largest and most valuable fish stocks, including the Northeast Arctic cod, which are also among the best-managed fish stocks in the world. The Arctic region is also the world's largest unexplored prospective area for petroleum, with estimates indicating that large volumes of oil and gas remain to be found in the area – especially offshore. In addition, extensive maritime transport – current and prospective – through the important shipping lanes of this region, contributes to highlighting the environmental challenges which we are faced with in the High North.

Norway's Integrated Ocean Management Plans

As a country highly dependent on the sustainable use of the oceans, Norway has for a number of years been working on developing and adopting integrated management plans for its coastal and ocean areas, as a tool for handling such tasks and tackling such challenges as these circumstances entail.

The purpose of this endeavour has been – and is – to provide clear, predictable and operational frameworks for the existing and new activities – including the exploitation of the resources and the conservation of the environment – in these marine and maritime areas. The aim is furthermore to facilitate long-term and responsible value creation based on the sustainable use of

¹ It should be noted that a corresponding absence of exceptionalism as far as the Arctic is concerned is also to be found with regard to international law: The 1982 U.N. Convention of the Law of the Sea and related global legal instruments apply to the Arctic Ocean and adjacent waters in the same ways and to the same extent as is the case with regard to other maritime areas of the world.

the resources in these ocean areas, while at the same time safeguarding the environment and preserving the structures and productivity of their ecosystems.

As a first step, the Norwegian government in 2006 adopted an integrated management plan for the Barents Sea and the ocean areas off the Lofoten archipelago. The plan had an initial time horizon until 2020, with the stipulation that it would be subject to periodic reviews. Such a review was conducted in 2011, when the plan was updated with a new time horizon set to 2040.²

In the meantime (in 2009) the Norwegian government adopted a corresponding management plan for the Norwegian Sea.³ The relevant authorities and agencies are now in the process of developing a plan along the same pattern for the North Sea, with the aim of being completed in 2013.

Main Characteristics

The integrated management plans envisage systematic supervision of the ocean environment and measures for managing ocean resources, based on the ecosystem approach. Other main features that characterize this system and contribute to the uniqueness of this particular approach, include the following:

- In addition to the sector-oriented planning and management, a cross-sectorial perspective has been adopted. Thus, the Norwegian management plans intend to be a knowledge-based tool for facilitating value-creation as well as for safeguarding the environment. The plans have been designed to identify measures which enable the authorities to reconcile the need for economic activity within petroleum industry, fisheries and maritime transport with the need to protect the arctic marine environment. The keyword is *co-existence* within the parameters of *sustainable development*.
- In developing the management plans, relevant research institutions, government agencies and management bodies have jointly contributed to the preparation of a common knowledge base for the subsequent political decisions. This has facilitated and strengthened the overall quality of the work.

² *First update of the Integrated Management Plan for the Marine Environment of the Barents Sea-Lofoten Area. Meld. St. 10 (2010-2011) Report to the Storting (white paper);*
<http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/md/dok/regpubl/stmeld/2010-2011/meld-st-10-20102011.html?id=682050#>.

³ *Report No.37 to the Storting (2008-2009) Integrated Management of the Marine Environment of the Norwegian Sea;* <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/md/dok/regpubl/stmeld/2008-2009/report-no-37-2008-2009-to-the-storting.html?id=577875#>.

- The processes leading up to the eventual adoption of the management plans have been accompanied with a substantial amount of popular consultation (“stakeholder participation”), including open hearings. This is a time-consuming exercise, but it has been considered to be necessary to ensure that all legitimate voices are heard, so that the plans will be as democratically-based as possible.
- As an additional bonus of positive “spin-off” from this open and inclusive approach, the very processes of developing the management plans have been a most useful educational experience for everyone involved, enhancing the general level of knowledge in the public debate.
- It should furthermore be noted that Norway's integrated management plans do not introduce any form of “micro-management”, such as concrete management decisions or new management bodies to replace existing structures where those are already in place and well-functioning. The plans are designed to provide an operational framework including general guidelines and necessary coordination, not to make specific implementary decisions. Existing, well-functioning management frameworks continue, undisturbed by the presence of new, overarching strategic superstructures.
- Finally, as mentioned briefly earlier in this presentation, the Norwegian integrated management plans are subject to *mandatory periodic reviews* (updates). The reason for this is that the plans should be flexible enough to be adjusted or, as the case might be, revised, taking into account new knowledge and new experience and lessons learned *en route*. This gives each of the plans the extra dimension of being a *dynamic process*, and not just a “plan” in the narrow, rigid or static sense.

The Regional Context

The Norwegian Integrated Ocean Management Plans are *national* plans – i.e. they have a geographical scope confined to waters subject to Norwegian jurisdiction. Nevertheless, some of the key issues currently confronting us in the High North (including, above all, environment conservation and resource management issues) have *transboundary* aspects, and call for international or regional cooperation, as well as an integrated approach.

Thus, even though the eastern (Russian) part of the Barents Sea is not part of the area comprised by the Norwegian Barents Sea management plan, the plan has ramifications with regard to Norway's relations with Russia. Therefore, in the process of developing its plan for the Barents Sea, Norwegian authorities have worked actively to engage Russia in a constructive dialogue. This policy has yielded positive results, such as the cooperation taking place in the Marine

Environment Group under the auspices of the Norwegian-Russian Joint Commission on the Environment.

The Norwegian government has also conducted constructive dialogues on IOM issues with other neighbours. This includes close cooperation with the EU – esp. with regard to the development of the EU's Ocean Strategy Directive (which was adopted in 2009).

In the broader regional context, special mention should be made of the substantial contribution provided by Norway to the on-going IOM efforts of the Arctic Council, in particular the project "Best Practices in Ecosystems-based Ocean management in the Arctic" (BEPOMAR).

In view of the transboundary aspects of the issues confronting us in the High North, it is the belief of the Norwegian government that its experience with integrated ocean management plans can provide a fruitful input to discussing these issues in a bilateral as well as in a regional setting. Although not pretending to have the final cut-and-dried answers to all the questions and challenges that these issues entail, Norwegian authorities do, however, believe in the virtue of sharing their own experiences with others – friends and neighbours, thus hoping to be able to make a difference.