

International and regional cooperation on marine resource management

Roar Stangnes

Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

As far back as we have any historical records, people in Norway have supported themselves by fishing and hunting. Marine resources have been the foundation for livelihoods and for our coastal culture, and for dealings with other countries. Norway's geographical situation and long coastline give Norway access to some of the world's richest fish stocks. The North Sea, Norwegian coastal waters, the Barents Sea and the polar front in the Norwegian Sea are all highly productive areas, and large fish stocks have their spawning grounds just off our coast. The coastal waters offer particularly suitable conditions for fish farming, which has become very important for settlement patterns and employment along the coast in recent years.

1. SOUND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Norway bases its natural resource management on scientific findings and recommendations. In Norway's view, fish stocks and marine mammals should be harvested provided that this can be done within safe biological limits. We should harvest nature's surplus of both fish and marine mammals such as whales and seals, but must at the same time safeguard the natural resource base for our own and future generations. This means that there must be a balance between natural production and the harvest we take from fish stocks. In the long term, this is also the only strategy that will give the maximum possible economic yield at all stages of the fishing, whaling and sealing industries.

Our management regimes for marine resources are therefore based on extensive fisheries research. In order to determine a safe level for the catch from each stock, it is necessary to obtain as much information as possible on numbers, reproduction rate, age structure, geographical distribution and migration patterns, nutrition, growth and mortality. Monitoring and data collection are continually in progress for commercially important stocks, and scientists provide annual stock assessments and advise the management authorities as to appropriate quota levels. International cooperation and greater agreement on calculation methods should be important goals for research into these matters in the years ahead.

2. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Cooperation with other countries is of crucial importance if we are to ensure that catches are kept within an ecologically sustainable framework. Norway

is a member of the regional fishery management organizations NEAFC (North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission) and NAFO (North West Atlantic Fisheries Organization). In addition, Norway cooperates with other countries on the basis of bilateral and multilateral fisheries agreements. In 1977, Norway established an economic zone stretching 200 nautical miles from the mainland. Later the same year, we established a 200-mile fisheries protection zone around Svalbard, and in 1980 a 200-mile fisheries zone around Jan Mayen. These steps have given Norway rights to and the responsibility for managing very extensive marine resources. We share the commercially most important fish stocks with other countries, and are engaged in bilateral cooperation with Russia on fish stocks in the Barents Sea and with the EU on stocks in the North Sea. We have agreements on quota exchanges with the Faeroe Islands and Greenland, and bilateral quota agreements with Sweden and Poland. There is also a trilateral capelin agreement involving Norway, Iceland and Greenland. For 1998, we have concluded agreements with Iceland, the Faeroe Islands, the EU and Russia on the management of Norwegian spring-spawning herring.

Norway ratified the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the UN agreement on high seas fisheries in 1996. The UN agreement is an important instrument in international efforts to promote sound management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks. The agreement gives us a framework to find regional solutions to fisheries problems in our neighbouring areas.

3. FISHERIES COOPERATION BETWEEN RUSSIA AND NORWAY

The migratory fish stocks and biological conditions in the Barents Sea make it necessary for Norway and Russia to cooperate closely in implementing a rational resource management policy. The Joint Norwegian-Russian Fisheries Commission is responsible for cooperation on stock management, and a number of fish stocks in the Barents Sea are managed under bilateral fisheries agreements.

The most important fish stock managed in this way is the North-East Arctic cod stock, which is found in the Economic Zone of Norway, in the fisheries zone around Svalbard, in the Russian Economic Zone and in international waters in the Barents Sea (the "Loophole"). The Joint Fisheries Commission sets the total allowable catch (TAC) each year on the basis of scientific recommendations. A quota is set aside for third countries that have traditionally fished from the

stock before the total quota is divided between the two parties.

The management regime is based on the principle that the harvest from the stock must not exceed the maximum sustainable yield. The importance of sustainable harvesting by the coastal states has already been demonstrated. The cod stock in the Barents Sea dropped sharply in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but after several years when low quotas were maintained, the stock has grown considerably, and much larger catches can be taken. The present decline must be taken seriously to rebuild the stock to its recent level of abundance. In contrast, all the other cod stocks in the North Atlantic are at very low levels, and the fisheries based on them have been much reduced or temporarily closed.

Another issue involved in our cooperation with Russia and related to our close geographical proximity is landings of fish from Russian vessels in Norway. Seen purely from the Norwegian point of view, this strengthens the basis for maintaining our fish processing industry, for employment and for positive economic development. However, at the same time it creates corresponding problems in northwestern Russia. Norway's policy is to promote the recovery of the Russian fish processing industry, so that it can accept a larger proportion of Russian landings. This is an obligation that Norway both should and will continue to honour, despite our own pressing need for the supply of raw materials.

4. FISHERIES COOPERATION BETWEEN NORWAY AND THE EU

Norway and the EU cooperate closely on fisheries management within the framework of the bilateral quota negotiations, and the aim of both parties is to devise a sustainable management policy. Cooperation on the management of joint stocks in the North Sea is implemented through the annual quota agreements. The parties also exchange quotas for stocks in exclusive economic zones in other waters, such as North-East Arctic cod. Efforts are made to ensure that such quota exchanges are balanced.

The status of the stocks in the North Sea is very different from that in the Barents Sea. A number of fish stocks have been seriously depleted. In recent years, drastic measures have been implemented to stop the decrease in some stocks, such as North Sea herring and mackerel. Further efforts are also needed to prevent a further drop in certain demersal fish stocks such as cod, haddock, whiting and plaice. Both Norway and the EU are giving high priority to the improvement of fisheries management in the North Sea. The situation in the North Sea demonstrates that it is clearly in the interests of the countries concerned to manage resources in such a way as to ensure a stable long-term yield. This will help to safeguard the resource base for future generations of fishermen.

5. REGULATION OF THE FISHERIES

The Norwegian authorities regulate fisheries in order to provide the best possible long-term economic yield. There are two main elements of fisheries regulation. Firstly, we must determine a harvesting strategy, i.e. how much is to be caught each year. This must be determined on the basis of scientific information about the stocks and on recommendations from scientists. Norway relies heavily on recommendations from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) when determining total quotas. For stocks that are in poorer condition, such as several of the North Sea stocks (herring, cod, mackerel and plaice), ICES makes clear recommendations to restrict catches. However, for stocks that are in better condition, the ICES recommendations give greater freedom of choice as regards stock management. This is, for instance, the case for North-East Arctic cod and for Norwegian spring-spawning herring, which are now in good condition after several decades of recovery.

Secondly, we must decide on the size of the fish to be caught or the harvesting pattern that is to be followed. A particular total quota can be caught in many different ways, and a number of measures are implemented to prevent excessive catches of small fish. These include a prohibition on returning catches to the sea, provisions relating to minimum sizes and to fishing gear (mesh sizes, the use of sorting grids) and the closure of fishing grounds. The prohibition on returning catches to the sea is probably the measure that distinguishes Norwegian fisheries management most from other management regimes such as that of the EU. In Norway, it is prohibited to return catches of fish to the sea, because this makes it impossible to calculate the total mortality of all stocks attributable to commercial fisheries. Norwegian regulations require the registration of all fish caught, and for commercially important species, catches are deducted from quotas. I think I am justified in saying that Norway is a pioneer in this regard, and I believe that other countries may also find that this can be a useful fisheries policy instrument.

6. FISHERIES TECHNOLOGY

At the UNCED conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the term "responsible fishing" was launched to describe the sustainable use of marine resources without adverse environmental effects. In addition to the measures described above, the development of selective fisheries technology can be a further means of making fisheries more sustainable. Norway has for many years carried out research into fish behaviour and fisheries technology with a view to rational, sound harvesting of its marine resources. One result has been the development of sorting grids to be mounted in trawls. These prevent juvenile and undersized fish from reaching the codend, and instead sort them out of the catch without damaging them, so that they can

continue to grow to a suitable size. Sorting grids are mandatory in both shrimp and cod trawls.

7. OTHER IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Norway is a member of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), which among other things is responsible for regulating fisheries in the Southern Ocean. The Antarctic waters cover a huge area and contain rich fish resources. The principle of sustainable management must also be applied to this vulnerable region, and Norway is giving high priority to halting illegal fisheries in the Antarctic. During the past year, Norway has implemented a number of measures to this end. New Norwegian regulations have been laid down relating to fishing in the CCAMLR area, and these require fishing vessels flying the Norwegian flag to comply with the conservation measures implemented by the Commission. Norwegian vessels may only fish in the CCAMLR area with special licences from the Norwegian authorities. Norwegian regulations also prohibit the landing of catches taken in unregulated fisheries and access to ports by vessels that have taken such catches, except in cases of force majeure. Norway has also laid down new and stricter regulations concerning fishing in international waters for vessels flying the Norwegian flag.

8. THE INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION

Norway's policy on the management of whale stocks is also based on the principle of sustainable use of marine resources. Our catch of minke whales does not in any way threaten the stock. This has been clearly demonstrated by the abundance estimates from the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission.

There is increasing recognition in the IWC that the present stalemate cannot continue as there is a real threat of the organization becoming obsolete. There is concern that whaling operations may in future be out of control, since the IWC has proved to be unable to live up to its responsibilities as set out in the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, namely to "provide for the proper conservation of whale stocks and thus make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry". Norway shares these concerns and sees the need for the IWC to function as a credible management organization. This is clearly not the case today.

We therefore support the initiative taken by the Commissioner for Ireland to find ways of breaking the present impasse. We are participating in the discussions in the IWC on a compromise solution which would recognize current Norwegian whaling operations. Our whaling quota is sustainable, based on

scientific advice, and calculated in accordance with the rules adopted by the IWC's Scientific Committee. Any solution must not restrict our whaling operations in waters under national jurisdiction. We cannot compromise our sovereign rights as set out in the Convention on the Law of the Sea.

9. CONTROL AND ENFORCEMENT MEASURES

Norwegian fisheries management gives high priority to implementing control and monitoring measures to ensure compliance with acts and regulations. Norway considers it important to control all activities associated with the fisheries. This means control both of fishing activities at sea and of the landing and sale of catches.

The Norwegian Coastguard Service is a subordinate agency of the Ministry of Defence, and is responsible for controlling fishing operations by Norwegian and foreign vessels in Norwegian waters. The Coastguard Service controls catch logbooks and checks that the catch on board agrees with the information in the logbook. Discrepancies are reported and punished by fines. In the case of very serious contraventions of the regulations, fishing gear may be confiscated and fishing rights withdrawn. Another important task for the Coastguard Service is the control of foreign fishing vessels at specific control points along the Norwegian coast. Before foreign fishing vessels leave the Economic Zone of Norway north of 62° N, they are required to report to one of these control points. This arrangement has a preventive effect, and catches in excess of quotas have been substantially reduced since its introduction in 1994.

Norwegian fisheries are to a large extent based on stocks that we share with one or more other states. Norwegian fisheries management therefore gives high priority to cooperation in the development of better control regimes with countries with which we share resources. We have been cooperating satisfactorily with Russia for some years already. In recent years, we have also been seeking to strengthen cooperation on control measures with the EU. This involves cooperation both with the European Commission as such and with Scotland, Ireland and Denmark. In addition, we cooperate with the Faeroe Islands on control measures. Such cooperation has had encouraging results, and its further development will continue to be given high priority.