

The Norwegian ecosystem-based management plan for the Barents Sea and sea areas off the Lofoten Islands

By: Dr. Erik Olsen, Research Scientist, Institute of Marine Research, PO Box 1870 Nordnes, N-5817 Bergen, Norway, E-mail: eriko@imr.no. Phone: +47 55238606, Fax: +47 55238531

Abstract

In April 2006 the Norwegian government launched a White paper on a new, integrated management plan for the Norwegian part of the Barents Sea. This paper is currently debated in parliament, and will form the basis for an integrated and ecosystem-based management plan of the area. The plan proposes an ecologically viable balance between the use of marine resources (renewable and non-renewable) and the need for safeguarding the production potential and health state of the marine ecosystem.

The management plan is based on an assessment of the current and future impact on the ecosystem of human activities, and analyses on interactions between human activities, deficits in current knowledge of the state and dynamics of the ecosystem. To monitor the overall development and "health-state" of the Barents Sea a set of indicators with associated environmental quality objectives have been developed.

The plan provides overall guidelines for management of all human activities (oil and gas industry, fishing and shipping) in the area in order to ensure the continued health, production and function of the Barents Sea ecosystem. The main aim of the plan is to maintain a good state of the marine environment at the same time as allowing for sustainable use of marine resources. These goals are in general more ambitious than the goals stated in Norway's general environmental policy.

Area based management is at the core of the plan, identifying particularly valuable and vulnerable areas, either from ecological and/or human perspectives. In the different areas access for different human activities is carefully managed; eg. by seeking IMO permission for defined shipping lanes 35nm offshore, limiting trawling in sensitive areas and not opening some particularly valuable and vulnerable areas to petroleum activities.

To face the many serious challenges to the future state of the marine environment several new management measures are proposed. These cover the management of all human activities in the ecosystem, from measures to prevent IUU fishing, reduce pollution levels, increase preventive measures and emergency response systems for acute oil pollution, reinforce efforts to safeguarding biodiversity. To ensure an effective practical integrated management the plan proposes several ways to strengthen and improve cooperation between relevant authorities, both for the annual follow-up of the state of the environment, but also for the revisions of the plan (every 3-4 years).

The management plan stresses the need for continued and expanded international cooperation on ecosystem-based management of the Barents sea, and on global issues of concern, like pollution.