




The Office of the Auditor General of Norway's investigation of fisheries management in the North Sea and Skagerrak

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Summary

Background and objectives of the investigation

Many of the fish stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak were in a poor state in the 1970s and 1980s. More stringent regulations and controls have contributed to the restoration of these stocks, although demersal fish have not increased significantly, and some species are vulnerable or endangered. The authorities in Norway and the EU have considerable scope to regulate fishing. Cooperation with the EU and appropriate controls for fishing are essential to ensure sustainable management. Illegal discards of unintentional catches represent a particular challenge. The objective of this investigation was to assess whether the regulations, the controls and the cooperation with the EU are helping to ensure sustainable fisheries management in the North Sea and Skagerrak.

Findings

Norway and the EU cooperate on the management of many of the joint fish stocks, but a number of issues relating to joint management and regulations have still not been resolved

- Norway and the EU do not agree on the management of certain shared stocks and regulate these stocks unilaterally.
- Many joint management plans are either lacking or need to be updated.

- The EU is gradually introducing a landing obligation from 2016, but there are still significant differences in the regulations.

Norway and the EU do not cooperate adequately over fishing controls

- Norway does not participate in a practical cooperation with the EU regarding control. Neither Norway nor the EU estimate and highlight the scope of illegal discards.
- Norway and the EU exchange few statistics concerning catches, quotas and controls. This may weaken confidence in compliance with the agreements.

The overall control resources are not being utilised adequately

- The follow-up of controls carried out by the fish sales associations by the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries has been inadequate.
- The Directorate of Fisheries' controls are too predictable and insufficiently targeted.
- The cooperation regarding controls of scales and weighing is inadequate.
- The fishery authorities have placed too little emphasis on the management of coastal fish stocks.
- The fishery authorities have not monitored the sharp rise in wrasse fishing closely enough.
- The decline in stocks of coastal cod and coastal sprat has not been adequately followed up with measures.

Efforts to simplify the fishery regulations have so far produced few results

- Among other things, there are many detailed provisions, a number of regulations which all apply to the same issue, and different provisions covering the same fish species in the North Sea and the Skagerrak.
- The Directorate of Fisheries is not authorised to destroy unlabelled equipment that it seizes such as lobster pots, and so it has to report these cases and invest substantial resources in cases that are later dropped.
- The Directorate of Fisheries' efforts to simplify the fishery regulations have so far produced few results. Complicated regulations make it difficult to streamline fishing controls.

Recommendations

The Office of the Auditor General recommends that the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries:

- Works to strengthen cooperation with the EU concerning the management of shared stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak;
- Assesses measures for the improved management of coastal stocks in Southern Norway;
- Contributes to better utilisation of the control authorities' resources and expertise;
 - Specifies the sales associations' control tasks and strengthens the sales associations' control activities;
 - Ensures that the Directorate of Fisheries utilises the available information for more targeted controls and to strengthen the operational cooperation between the control authorities;
 - Ensures that the Directorate of Fisheries provides the industry and the general public with better information on the main outcomes of the controls; and
- Ensures progress in the work to simplify fishery regulations.

Ministry/ministries:

- Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries