

The Office of the Auditor General's investigation into the management of aquaculture

Summary

Background and goal of the investigation

Striking a balance between environmental sustainability and further growth and development of the industry has been an important goal of Norway's aquaculture policy for several years.

The goal of the investigation was to assess the extent to which the development and status of the aquaculture industry are in line with the national goal that the aquaculture industry shall be sustainable and environmentally sound, and to assess whether the authorities' use of policy instruments and follow-up is efficient and sufficient.

Method

The investigation is based on document analysis, statistics, case reviews, interviews, lists of questions and vignette surveys.

Results

The aquaculture industry has grown considerably for several years and is an important industry and employer. At the same time, however, the Office of the Auditor General's investigation shows that the strong growth of the industry entails significant environmental challenges. The challenges are greatest in areas with extensive aquaculture production.

The investigation shows that, because of persistently high figures for escaped fish, several rivers and watercourses have a high proportion of farmed fish among wild fish. In some areas, this has already affected the genetic distinctiveness of wild salmon. The goal of reducing impacts that threaten the genetic diversity of salmon to a non-harmful level by 2010 has not been achieved.

There are extensive losses of farmed fish, particularly as a result of disease. The disease situation has not improved since 2000, and the extensive losses also mean large financial losses for the industry. The prevalence of lice remains at a high level along large parts of the coast and this has a negative impact on wild fish, sea trout in particular.

Aquaculture contributes to discharges of large amounts of nutrient salts, organic material and chemicals in the areas around fish farms. Experts in different parts of the government administration disagree about the importance of the total discharges from the aquaculture industry. Chemicals are discharged untreated into the sea from fish farms,

however, and these agents have been shown to have a harmful impact on nature.

The aquaculture industry is dependent on large quantities of wild fish for fish feed. Fishing pressure on some of these species has been great.

With respect to policy instruments, the investigation shows that there are shortcomings in the planning of marine areas. When awarding licences to engage in fish farming and when regulating the aquaculture facilities, the main focus is on the individual site and less on the total environmental load from several aquaculture facilities in a wider area.

The Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs is responsible for setting the maximum amount of farmed fish that can be produced. Environmental considerations have been given greater emphasis in recent years when considering whether the aquaculture industry's production can be increased.