

Lessons learnt from developing and implementing integrated management plans in Norwegian waters.

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Keywords: Integrated management plans, from scientific knowledge to political decisions

Extended abstract

In 2002 the Norwegian parliament, the Storting, discussed the white paper “*Protecting the Riches of the Sea*” (Report No. 12 (2001 – 2002) to the Storting). One important proposal in the white paper was that integrated management plans should be developed for all Norwegian ocean and coastal areas. It was also said that these plans should be ecosystem based. The proposal was endorsed by the parliament and become then the political instrument and background for developing integrated management plans. The parliament decided that the first integrated management plan should be developed for the Norwegian part of the Barents Sea and the waters off Lofoten.

The plan was then developed and presented as a white paper to the Norwegian parliament (Report No. 8 (2005 – 2006) to the Storting, *Integrated management of the Marine Environment of the Barents Sea and Sea Area off the Lofoten Islands*) in spring 2006. When the parliament debated the white paper in June 2006 the proposals were endorsed and the proposals are now implemented in Norwegian policy for management of these areas.

Based on the experience from the development of the Barents Sea management plan the government decided to continue directly with the development of an integrated management plan for the Norwegian Sea. This plan will be presented as a white paper to the parliament in spring 2009. It was also decided to start preparatory work for the development of an integrated management plan for the Norwegian part of the North Sea, anticipated due in 2015.

The intention of the integrated management plans are to provide a framework for sustainable use of natural resources and goods derived from the actual area, maintaining at the same time the structure, functioning and productivity of the ecosystems. This means in particular securing co-existence between the fishing interests in its broadest understanding, the petroleum industry and maritime transport. The management plans intend to be instrumental in ensuring that business interests, local, regional and central authorities, environmental organisations and other interest groups all have a common understanding of the goals for the management of the actual area.

In order to secure a proper cooperation between the different interests an inter-ministerial Steering Committee chaired by the Ministry of the Environment was established in 2002. Members of the Steering Committee are relevant ministries, i.e. the Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs, the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the

Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion and the Ministry of Trade and Industry. The Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs and the Ministry of Oil and Energy are particular important members of the Steering Committee as they represent two very different interests in the same offshore waters.

By having an inter-ministerial Steering Committee responsible for, and organising the work of developing the integrated management plans give the work the proper political priorities. Further, the decision by the government that the management plans should be presented to the parliament for a final endorsement meant also that the plans as soon as they pass the parliament are becoming a political instrument.

Fundamental in the integrated management plans are impact assessments of the various activities taking place in the actual area and of the various external pressures that may have an impact on the actual marine ecosystems. Thus the impacts of oil and gas exploration and exploitation, fishing activities and maritime traffic have to be assessed as well as the effect of external forces like pollution, climate change and tourism. Governmental agencies are given the task of assessing their field of responsibilities.

To ensure broad participation, transparent procedures are followed and various interested parties and experts are involved in the work. Stakeholders are invited to comment in various stages of the development of the management plans. A broad open presentation of the work leading up to the management plan for the Barents Sea and the areas off the Lofoten islands were held in northern Norway and a similar conference about the management plan for the Norwegian Sea is scheduled this autumn in western Norway.

The inter-ministerial Steering Committee is responsible for compiling data and developing the management plans. Expert groups, one for each area, are established for compiling and assessing the necessary scientific background documentation. All relevant governmental organisations, i.e. directorates and research institutes, participate in the expert groups. The expert groups reports to the Steering Committee. The work in the expert groups and the extra work that has to be done by the various governmental institutions are given priority through instructions from their ministry in the ordinary budgetary system.

It is a challenge to merge all different interest in a final political document. Before becoming the final political document, the white paper, there are fairly intensive discussions between the various ministries about formulations in the text of the white paper. Each ministry is obliged to advocate their special interests, but through the work in the Steering Committee most of the disagreements are solved. Unsolved issues have to be left for the ministers themselves to decide.

The introduction of expressions like ecosystem-based approach to management, sustainable harvest of marine resources and protecting vulnerable habitats have to be explained in common language.

As immediate results of the integrated management plan for the Barents Sea the following can be mentioned: “no petroleum” zones, zero discharge from off-shore petroleum installations, mandatory routing and traffic separation schemes for maritime traffic, three working groups established for the purpose of follow of the plan, one with the task of coordinating monitoring and research in particular connected to the indicators developed in the management plan, another to work out common understanding of the risk assessment concept and the third to be

a scientific forum for discussions of the follow up of the plan. The three groups report to the Steering Committee. In addition two research programs are established, one for mapping the sea bed and one for monitoring seabird populations. Results from this work will be used in the revision of the plan in 2010.