

Oil and fish in Norwegian waters – conflict or coexistence?

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Norway

1. Presentation:

Arne Helge Kristoffersen:

- Representative from the Norwegian Coastal Fishermen Union (NCFU). Second Chair leader of the Union until May 2008.
- Coastal fisherman from Lofoten, Northern Norway with many years of experience from Norwegian fishery, both coastal and offshore fleet.
- NCFUs representative in the workgroup who recently evaluated the rules of economical compensation for fishermen in connection to seismic surveys.
- Live and work in one of the most controversial areas in the Norwegian debate regarding future oil activity in the northern areas – The Lofoten Islands.

The Norwegian Coastal Fishermen Union (Norges Kystfiskarlag):

- Founded in 1988.
- Approximately 1000 members.
- Organize coastal fishermen along the entire Norwegian coast – the majority belongs to vessels less than 15 meters, some members also belong to vessels up to 21 meters.
- National headquarter located in the Lofoten Islands and its strongpoint is in Northern Norway.
- Representative for the traditional Norwegian coastal fishery – with net, line and hooks as the most common fishing gear.
- Member of the Alliance of Coastal Fishers around the North Atlantic (ACFNA) together with fishermen organizations from Iceland, Greenland, Newfoundland/Canada and the Faroe Islands
- Has spoken against oil activity in important and traditional fishing areas – most recently this summer when seismic surveys during the Greenland halibut fishery outside Lofoten, Vesteraalen and Troms were a controversial issue.

2. History:

Norway has

- Long traditions as a fishing nation – with both a large traditional coastal fleet spread along the coast, and a smaller off-shore fleet.
- Played a part as an important oil producer since the middle of the 1970`s.

While oil and gas is the nations largest export product in value, fish is the second largest. Both activities are crucial for the Norwegian economy.

While the modern Norwegian economy is built on oil – work, income and settlement along the Norwegian coast, especially in Northern Norway, are built on fish.

Norwegian petroleum industry:

- First discovery of oil, North Sea 1969.
- The world`s tenth largest producer of oil and gas, and the fifth largest exporter. (2.7 mill. barrels oil equivalents per day (2006) – as compared to Russia`s 9.7 mill. barrels o.e./day).
- Only offshore located production.
- Petroleum exploration allowed north of 62. latitude, including Barents Sea, from 1980.
- The discussion about petroleum in the Barents Sea gained new actuality after 2000.

Norwegian Fishery:

- Second largest seafood export nation (2005)
- 13 932 registered fishermen (2006)
- 7 305 registered fishing vessels (2006). 1 652 of these are classified as “all-year-round vessels”, and out of these 1 443 belong to the coastal fleet
- Total catch: 2 392 061 live weight tonnes in 2006. Value: 11 693 760 000 NOK.

3. Coexistence

Fishery and petroleum industry has coexisted in Norwegian waters for nearly 40 years.

It started in the North Sea during the 1970`s. The public impression has been that this has taken place mainly without conflict.

Is this true?

- YES would authorities and the petroleum industry probably claim.
- Not necessarily so, would be the answer from the fishermen:
 - Fishermen feel as they are loosing out in conflicts regarding use of marine areas.
 - Fishing stocks and catches have declined dramatically. We know that overfishing is part of the reason, especially caused by the international trawler fleet, but what influence oil activity in the North Sea has had on the stocks is yet uncertain.
 - It has been claimed that chemicals used by the petroleum industry has caused genetically changes and made fish infertile. If this is true, it could be part of the explanation for the decline of the fish stocks.
 - Fishermen also claim that fish stocks no longer use the traditional spawning areas due to drilling and seismic surveys.
 - Fisheries loosing out in the competition for workforce with the petroleum industry – especially the marine part of the industry, is another issue for debate.

As the petroleum industry expands north along the coast and into the Barents Sea (driven by the natural decline of oil resources in the North Sea after nearly 40 year of activity), the level of conflict seems to rise:

- The Barents Sea is one of the richest marine ecosystems in the world. It supports the world's largest remaining stock of Atlantic cod, an abundance of other fish species, as well as sea birds, sea mammals and benthic flora and fauna.
- The Lofoten area is the birthplace for the important Northeast Arctic cod stock.
- Large fish stocks – herring, cod, capelin that wander along the coast to spawn, is the fundament for the scattered settlement along the Norwegian coast.
- The coastal communities depend on fisheries, and they are very vulnerable for changes in the fish stocks. Fish is a renewable resource. Oil is not.
- The coastal communities might be small – but every single one of them exports large amounts of fish, and are therefore economically important. During January to April 2008 the fishermen of Flakstad alone (less than 1 500 inhabitants and 172 registered fishermen), sold fish for approximately 80 000 000 NOK.
- The majority of the Norwegian coastal fleet belongs in northern Norway. The northern fisheries are therefore more vulnerable for oil pollution and loss of traditional fishing areas.
- High level of fishing activity, a large coastal fleet and the narrow size of the continental shelf, makes the potential for area conflicts higher in the north than in the North Sea.

What do the fishermen and the coastal communities fear?

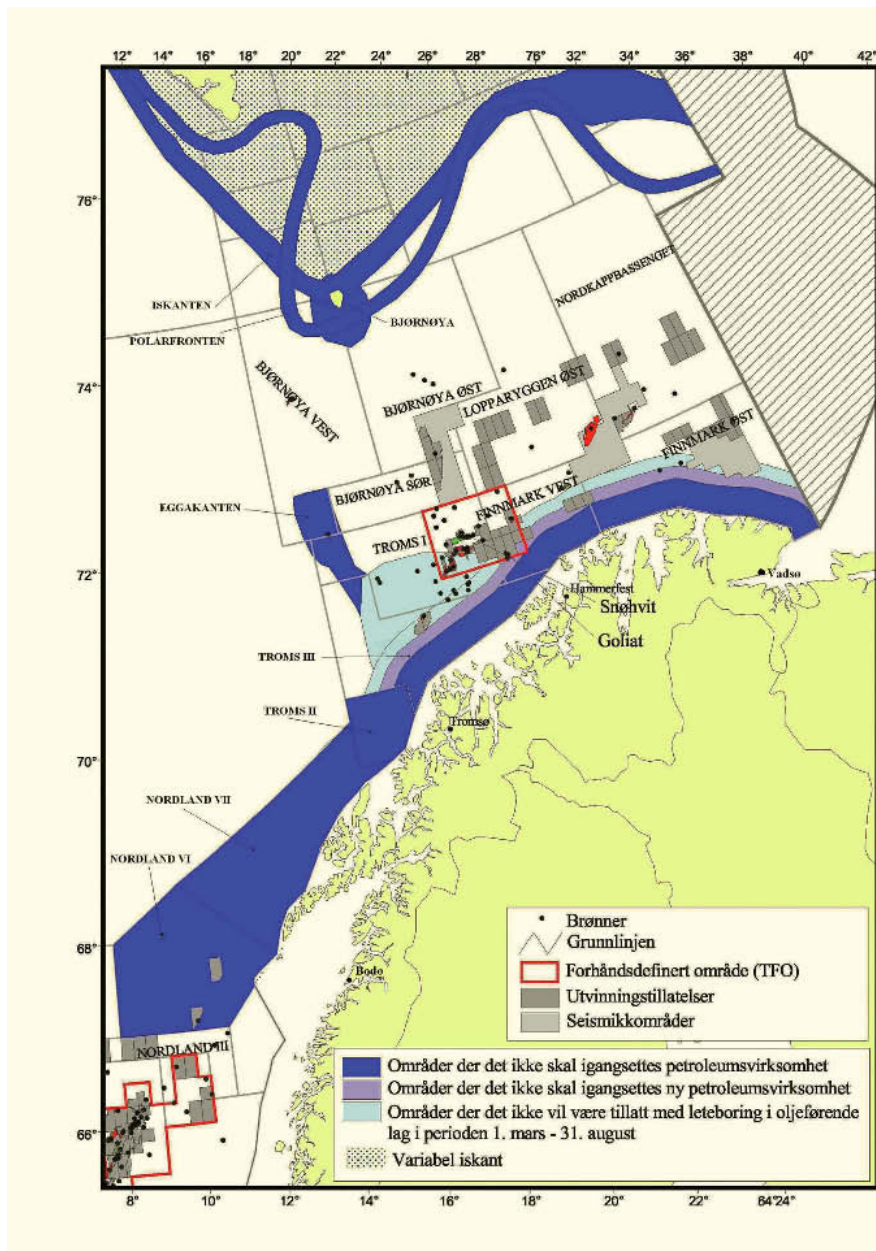
- An accident involving oil pollution on a large scale during the worst possible conditions (near the coast, during spawning, bad weather conditions etc) could be a possible catastrophe for the involved fishing communities.
- Even if the long-term biological consequences for the stocks might not be so big (it is said that we might risk loosing the outcome of one or two years of spawning) – the economical consequences for the communities would be dramatic.
- Long-term biological consequences due to pollution from the petroleum industry.
- Reduced catches.
- Loosing access to traditional fishing areas.

4. Experience

What have the northern fishermen experienced so far?

The management plan for the Barents Sea was decided by Norwegian authorities in 2006.

It defines several important fishing areas as current petroleum free zones:



Dark blue = petroleum free zones.

Violet = areas where no new licenses are given.

Light blue = exploration not to be permitted in spring and summer.

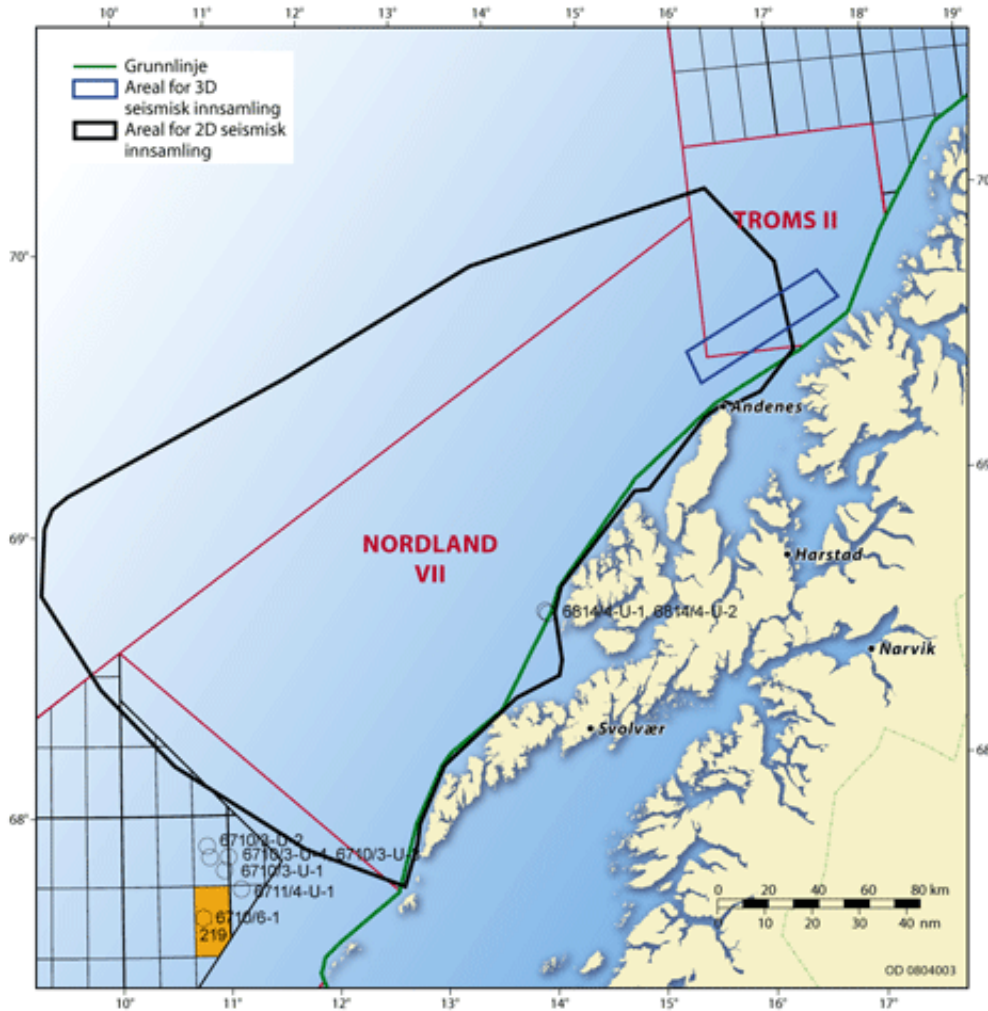
Black dots = wells.

Grey boxes = licenses already given.

Most areas to be reconsidered in update of the management plan in 2010.

The plan is to be evaluated in 2010 and the pressure to open these zones for petroleum industry will probably be enormous. So will the resistance.

Despite the decision to establish petroleum free zones, the authorities have allowed seismic surveys to be conducted for four months - from May to September 2008 - in large parts of the area. The surveys are undertaken with vessels using large airguns which “fire” sonic waves into the geological structures below the sea to find possible petroleum deposits. Hydrophones are used to record the sound waves as they are reflected back. The hydrophones are attached to cables, several km long and sometimes several parallel cables. This activity went on right in the middle of important fishing seasons.



The authorities even decided to divide the fishing area for the coastal fishery for Greenland halibut – closing an important part of the fishing area and allowing seismic surveys to go on there in stead. This decision came only a few days before the fishery – limited to only five weeks a year, was supposed to open, and when most of the fleet already had started the preparations for their season. The decision has caused economically losses, loss of catches and practical problems for the fleet, and many boats were forced to give up the fishery for Greenland halibut this year.

It is well known that seismic surveys scares fish away on a long distance. Scientific studies have shown that fish can be scared on a distance of 33 kilometres. Other results claim that the right distance is only 5 kilometres. When the closed area opened we saw that catches were low. Also commercial fishing taking place near by the closed area in the period of seismic activity were low. Many fishermen now apply for economical compensation due to losses of catch.

This year’s experience shows that there is a real danger that the coastal fleet will loose their fishing grounds as a result of the petroleum industry moving north.

Other experiences:

Two cases of accidental discharges to sea from Norwegian offshore oil platforms during the recent 12 months tell us that the safety measures are not nearly good enough, and that there are good reasons not to allow the petroleum industry into important fishing areas.

The experience from “Snøhvit” in the city of Hammerfest, tells us that the technology to avoid any sort of pollution is hardly present. “Snøhvit” was a prestige project supposed to have zero environmentally harmful discharges. Instead we know that they have had to apply for dispensation from emission limits again and again, and that there have been big problems with air pollution in Hammerfest. “Snøhvit” is a liquefied natural gas plant (LNG) of the same type as now being built on Sakhalin.

Fishermen are well aware of the climatically conditions in the sea areas in Northern Norway. We are not convinced that the Norwegian oil spill contingency preparedness are satisfying when it comes to the ability of preventing oil pollution to reach land or vulnerable areas during difficult weather conditions.

During the last year or so cooperation between the petroleum industry, authorities and the fishermen unions has increased. The oil industry and the authorities seem to be more aware of the need to cooperate with the fishermen to get access to northern resources. Working groups where both fishermen and oil industry has been represented have discussed issues like compensation for loss of catches etc. Still decisions like the closing of the Greenland halibut fishery are taken and coastal fishermen are forced to give up their fishing grounds. This happens *despite* the fact that Norwegian law gives the fishing fleet priority...

Is coexistence just a word to secure the interest of the oil industry??

5. Conclusion

Based on the experiences so far, and taking today’s level of technology into consideration, we find that there are too many uncertainties regarding the impact on fishery and the environment to allow the petroleum industry access to one of the richest marine ecosystems in the world, and the very birthplace of several important fish stocks.

To open these areas for petroleum activity now would be taking unnecessary risk with both food supply and the environment.

The Norwegian Coastal Fishermen’s Union therefore demand that the petroleum free zones should remain petroleum free also after 2010 and until technology and experience tell us that petroleum industry can take place without any negative impact on fishery and stocks. We will also reject any financial arrangement that allow petroleum industry to “buy themselves” into the areas through economical compensation.