

Audit of the management of fishery resources

The Ministry of Fisheries has not succeeded in reducing the total catch capacity in the Norwegian fishing fleet. The quota agreements for the important stocks of Norwegian Arctic cod and haddock have been above the maximum harvest recommendations, but the estimates of the stocks indicate that they are now in a biologically sustainable condition. The Ministry's risk assessments in the control efforts, the monitoring of the sales organisations and the evaluation of key policy instruments, have been unsystematic and insufficiently documented.

These are some of the findings from *The Office of the Auditor General's study of the management of fishery resources, Document no. 3:13 (2003-2004)*, which was submitted to the Norwegian parliament (Storting) on 13 September 2004. The aim of the study was to evaluate whether the management of the fishery resources is in accordance with the goal of ensuring the basic conditions for a sustainable and profitable fisheries industry.

The study of the resource management covers the six economically most important fish stocks: Norwegian Arctic cod, Norwegian Arctic haddock, Norwegian spring-spawning herring, Norwegian Arctic saithe, mackerel and capelin. The estimate of the size of each of the six selected fish stocks indicates that they are in a biologically sustainable condition and that with the exception of cod they have also been managed within certain margins of safety (precautionary approach). The study also shows that the quota agreements for Norwegian Arctic cod and haddock have been systematically larger than the scientific recommendations for maximum harvest. The Ministry of Fisheries agrees that this increases the risk that the stocks will not recover sufficiently, and that this also can increase their vulnerability relative to natural fluctuations in the spawning stock.

Throughout the 1990s, there has been considerable overcapacity in the Norwegian fishing fleet relative to the quota basis. Therefore, it has over a long period of time been a goal to reduce the capacity, primarily by reducing the number of vessels. The Office of the Auditor General's study shows that there has been a considerable and lasting growth in the catch capacity despite the fact that the number of vessels has decreased. This is due to larger and more powerful vessels and more efficient fishing gear. In the period from 1990 to 2002, the number of vessels decreased by 24% in the coastal fishing fleet that takes part in the limited access fishing for cod, haddock and saithe north of 62° N latitude. Nevertheless, the capacity increased by 30%. Likewise, in the period from 1988 to 2003, the number of vessels greater than 28 metres decreased by 29%, while the technical capacity increased by 72%. This shows that the policy instruments for reducing the capacity have not worked as intended.

The Office of the Auditor General's study shows that the Ministry has not required the sales organisations to use the funds they seize when quotas are overrun, etc. for intensified control efforts as it signalled in information given to the parliament in 2001. The study also shows that the fisheries management's risk assessments in the control efforts have rarely been systematic and documented in writing. The Ministry agrees with this assessment and states that it has initiated a project to document the risk assessments.

The study has also shown that systematic and documented evaluations have not been performed to a sufficient extent in the fisheries administration in order to study the effect of

key policy instruments. The Ministry of Fisheries states that it is working to improve routines and practices in this area.