

Oceans Management 2.0

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Climate change, increasing economic activity, and a growing understanding of how oceans are to be managed, has brought the concept of Integrated Oceans Management to the fore. Essentially, this concept means that the cumulative effects of various pressures on marine ecosystems are to be taken into consideration when managing oceans.

Numerous international agreements advocate the introduction of Integrated Oceans Management. In particular, the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) stated that "Oceans, seas, islands and coastal areas form an integrated and essential component of the Earth's ecosystem and are critical for global food security and for sustaining economic prosperity ...". Specifically, the WSSD "Encourage(d) the application by 2010 of the ecosystem approach...". Similar statements have been made in a number of international fora, including the United Nations General Assembly.

Many countries are now in the process of developing national ocean policies where "integrated oceans management" or a similar term ("ecosystem-based oceans management", "marine spatial planning") is central. All the Arctic nations are included in this group of countries.

In Norway, the growing interest in petroleum development in the North, together with the evolution in international standards for oceans management and concern for the valuable fisheries resources in the North, triggered work on Integrated Oceans Management. In 2001, the Norwegian Storting adopted a white paper setting out the broad principles. In 2008 a new Ocean Resources Act was adopted, transforming these principles into law.

The adoption of the white paper spurred a comprehensive process in developing what came to be called the Management Plan for the Bar-

ents Sea, which also concerns parts of the Norwegian Sea and the coast of Northern Norway southwards to the Lofoten Islands. The work was overseen by an inter-ministerial committee with representatives from the relevant ministries, and the final plan was adopted by the Storting in 2006. Since then a second management plan has been adopted for the Norwegian Sea, and a third plan for the North Sea is in the works.

The key feature of the Barents Sea Plan is that it identifies areas of particular biological significance ("vulnerable and valuable areas"), assesses the total impact of various activities and pressures on the marine ecosystems, and on this basis decides where and when petroleum activities can take place. The map shows the areas where petroleum activity is regulated.

The plan will be revised in 2011 based on the original knowledge foundation complemented with new information obtained from monitoring of important parameters and a comprehensive assessment of how various pressures might potentially affect the marine environment. The key issue is whether new areas are to be opened for petroleum-related activities.

What, then, are the lessons of the Norwegian experience for the wider Arctic when it comes to Integrated Oceans Management?

The Barents Sea is one of the areas in the Arctic that has been most widely researched. The work on the plan therefore benefitted from the existence of a major body of science, although it was also evident that new data were needed for the integrated assessments of impact. The central role of science in the plan is obviously a core element of its success.

A second element is that the process of formulating the plan was organised in a way that gave the outcome a high degree of political legitimacy. For example, stakeholders were given opportunities to comment on the plan. The fact that the plan was adopted by the Storting bolstered its prominence

and lent authority to its implementation.

Third, the actual implementation of the plan made use of pre-existing institutional structures. The only new bodies established serve the purpose of coordination and integration at ministerial and agency levels. The use of existing legislation and agencies, rather than going through a time-consuming process of establishing new ones, has provided for swift and effective implementation of the plan.

The Management Plan for the Barents Sea is however still a work in progress. As the scientific underpinnings of the plan evolve, so will the plan itself. Work on the plan is also likely to be affected by changing economic political circumstances.

The degree to which these experiences are applicable in other Arctic countries varies. The form and content of Integrated Oceans Management is context-dependent and will vary from case to case. However, Integrated Oceans Management raises a number of issues with commonalities across the Arctic region: ice-covered waters, transboundary cooperation, fisheries management, exploitation of petroleum under severe climatic conditions, long-range transport of pollutants, socioeconomic growth and sustainability issues, and the impacts of climate change. The core issue is however the same: the need to take all pressures on marine ecosystems into account when managing oceans.

Further reading:

Hoel AH (ed.) 2009. Best Practices in Ecosystem-based Oceans Management. *Rapportserie Norsk Polarinstitut*, No. 129

Hoel AH 2010. Integrated oceans management in the Arctic: Norway and beyond. *Arctic Review of Law and Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp 186-206

