

Annual Report of Marine Resources 1999

Summary

The 1999 overview of marine resources shows that there is still a need for caution when setting exploitation levels for the most important commercial species. The demersal stocks in the Barents Sea are diminishing, while the important capelin stock has a good growth. In the Norwegian Sea pelagic stocks are strong, however, several of the demersal stocks are in bad shape. The situation in the North Sea is brighter than in previous years. The prospects for the pelagic stocks are good, and even some of the demersal stocks have shown a positive development.

The prospects for the stocks of Northeast Atlantic cod are quite dismal, and we expect a further reduction in the stocks of Norwegian spring spawning herring in the next few more years. A positive development is that the stocks of several other species increased more in 1998 than in the previous year. Capelin stocks are now estimated at 2 million tonnes, twice the 1997 figure; but there are still no signs that this has resulted in increased individual growth of Northeast Atlantic cod. In the summer of 1998, we registered the largest stocks of blue whiting in the Norwegian Sea since 1980. The stocks of North Sea herring are increasing and there are indications that the 1996 year class of mackerel is quite strong.

Not since 1990 have the stocks of Northeast Atlantic cod been smaller. The spawning stock is estimated at 574.000 tonnes in 1999, while estimates of the total stock are 1.4 million tonnes. These figures are at 1980 levels and below average for the years after 1946. The reduction in cod stocks after 1993 is due to greater exploitation, lower individual growth and increased cannibalism. The year-classes from 1989 to 1992, however, appear to be stronger than average.

The model that has been used to estimate cod stocks has proved to be inadequate. Researchers at the Institute of Marine Research are therefore developing a new model, "Fleksibest" which we hope to begin utilising in the autumn of 1999.

In the coming years, we still expect low individual growth and high incidences of cannibalism. An increased capelin population is expected to gradually result in increased growth and less cannibalism, although this has not yet been confirmed through field data. On the contrary, in the last few years we have observed poor growth of one and two year old fish, so it is doubtful the increased capelin stocks will result in improved growth in these age groups.

The Norwegian stocks of coastal cod display the same development as the Northeast Atlantic cod. Stock estimates are approx. 290.000 tonnes.

Since 1990, there has been poor recruitment to the stocks of Northeast Atlantic haddock; total stock estimates have now been reduced to 260.000 tonnes. The spawning stock is currently at a

