

Our Ocean Conference, 5–6 October 2015. Norwegian Views.

Healthy oceans are one of the keys to a healthy future. However, their ecosystems are under pressure as a result of climate change, acidification, pollution and unsustainable harvesting. Our common task must be to eliminate these pressures, or at least reduce them to sustainable levels, and to secure productive, diverse and resilient marine ecosystems that can provide food and income opportunities for a growing world population.

Clean and productive oceans. We need clean and productive oceans to safeguard and improve the ecological basis for food production, both at sea and on land. The better care we take of the ocean, the better the ocean can help us meet our needs. Seafood plays a significant – but not yet fully recognised – role in global food security and nutrition. We must recognise the essential role of the oceans in providing nutritious food and sources of livelihood. Sustainable fisheries and sustainable aquaculture are vital if we are to feed a growing world population. Aquaculture is the fastest growing food industry, and fish are one of the most efficient converters of feed into high quality food.

Too many of the world's fish stocks are overfished or depleted. But we can improve this state of affairs. Illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing (IUU fishing), which undermines our attempts to keep fish harvests within sustainable limits, can be combated through improved international cooperation on the monitoring and enforcement of fishing restrictions. All states should accede to and apply the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures, under which vessels engaged in IUU fishing activities are to be denied entry into ports. FAO has a mandate to deal with IUU fishing as a resource management issue. However, this must be supplemented by efforts to combat transnational organised fisheries crime through organisations with a crime mandate, such as UNODC and INTERPOL. Overcapacity tends to lead to IUU fishing, and excess capacity should be reduced accordingly. And since overcapacity is largely due to subsidies, subsidies should be avoided.

Discards, for example of non-target species, should be prohibited. Discarding fish is a waste of food. The omission of significant amounts of fish from the catch statistics also complicates the task of the scientists who give advice on stock management. Independent scientific advice should form the basis for all decisions regulating fisheries. In the North Atlantic, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) has been providing scientific advice for more than 100 years. And cooperation between Norwegian and Russian marine scientists, which has continued uninterrupted for more than 40 years, deserves much of the credit for the healthy state of Barents Sea fish stocks.

Reducing marine litter and microplastics. Our oceans are becoming more and more polluted. Plastic waste is an increasing threat to biodiversity, fisheries, tourism and other marine industries that are dependent on the oceans and coastlines. This problem is rapidly increasing, due to the large and still growing consumption of plastics worldwide, combined with unsatisfactory waste management. To deal with this, we must both reduce the amounts of litter disposed of at sea and organise clean-up campaigns. Plastic litter degrades slowly. It takes 450 years for a plastic bottle to break down in the marine environment, but even then, it does not disappear – it ends up as tiny fragments known as microplastics. Microplastics are also released to the oceans with run-off and wastewater from land. Microplastics – which may also contain hazardous substances – can be eaten by marine organisms. They may possibly accumulate in food webs and marine ecosystems. More knowledge about sources, effects and ways of reducing levels of microplastics is crucial. Norway is working actively to ensure that marine plastic debris and microplastics are a priority area internationally. At the first UN Environmental Assembly (UNEA) in June 2014, Norway proposed a resolution on marine plastic debris and microplastics that was supported by all parties. The resolution encourages actions to reduce quantities of marine plastic litter and microplastics in the marine environment. Norway has allocated USD 1 million of our funding for UNEP for a study on microplastics to be presented at the second UNEA in May 2016. We urge all parties to contribute to a good outcome at UNEA 2016, and to support a resolution that sets out concrete measures to reduce microplastic pollution in our oceans.

Climate change and ocean acidification. Climate change and ocean acidification pose a severe threat to our oceans in the longer term. To reduce the risks, we need a successful and ambitious agreement at the international climate negotiations that will take us much closer to achieving the two-degree target. If we do not succeed in our efforts to reduce global emissions of CO₂, changes in the distribution of marine species and the loss of marine biodiversity in sensitive regions will threaten fisheries productivity and other ecosystem services from our oceans. To manage these risks, we will have to adapt. Adaptive management that can respond to variability and change is

needed as we may see changes in food webs, irreversible changes in ecosystems and large-scale translocations of industrial fishing. To limit the cumulative impacts, we must reduce other pressures – such as marine pollution and physical disturbance – where possible, and limit the pressure from unsustainable fishing and aquaculture. We also need to enhance the protection of marine and coastal ecosystems.

The oceans have already absorbed a substantial amount of the CO₂ that has been released to the atmosphere as a result of human activities. Acidification will continue to worsen due to both existing CO₂ and further emissions to air. To reduce the risks, we must intensify our efforts to reduce CO₂ emissions. Norway is working actively to ensure that strong provisions are adopted at COP21 in Paris in December. Ocean acidification is a particular problem in cold water, especially in the Arctic. Species that form carbonate shells, such as corals and many plankton species, are amongst the most vulnerable.

Integrated ocean management. Food production from the sea is dependent on the way we manage not only our fisheries, but also all other activities in the oceans and along the coasts – including land-based activities – that have an impact on the marine environment. In Norway, the relevant authorities have cooperated in developing integrated, ecosystem-based management plans for all Norway's sea areas, from Arctic waters to the Skagerrak. These plans provide a cross-sectoral framework for sustainable use of the oceans, through sound management of economic activities and by safeguarding the marine environment. We have used marine spatial planning as a tool in developing the integrated approach of the management plans. This makes it possible to maintain marine ecosystems and at the same time facilitate the coexistence of different industries, particularly the fisheries industry, maritime transport and the petroleum industry. Norway is ready to share the experience it has gained from drawing up integrated marine management plans with other interested states.

Knowledge is the key. Scientific advice is a key to informed decision-making. It is more than a hundred years since Norway started marine mapping, monitoring and research. Rapid changes in climate, ocean acidification and other environmental pressures increase the need for adaptation and new knowledge to underpin management decisions. Focus areas for research in Norway include climate change and ocean acidification modelling, and the effects of climate change and ocean acidification on marine organisms, including in the polar areas.

In order to strengthen European cooperation at the regulatory level, Norway has participated in establishing a joint programme for ocean research – JPI Oceans. The objective is to achieve better coordination of the research funds available to the various countries for marine and maritime research, and to facilitate sustainable growth by developing joint strategies.

Many developing states lack the infrastructure and capacity needed for science-based management. The EAF Nansen Project, which is administered by FAO, uses Norwegian expertise and is financed by Norway. During the 40 years it has been in operation, it has assisted more than 50 developing countries in mapping their marine living resources and building up their capacity for sustainable and ecosystem-based fisheries management. With a new research vessel in place in 2016, the next phase of the project will strengthen climate and environmental research.

Joint efforts for a sustainable future. The Law of the Sea provides the legal framework for all activities in the oceans and seas. The framework consists of several legal instruments with specific mandates and responsibilities. We must ensure effective implementation of these instruments at both national and regional level. And we need to provide funding to assist developing states to do the same.

Sustainable and ecosystem-based management of the oceans can only be achieved through constructive interaction between the organisations and bodies with an ocean mandate, such as the UN General Assembly, the International Maritime Organization, the International Seabed Authority, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the UN Environment Programme, regional fisheries management organisations and regional seas organisations. Strengthening cooperation and coordination within and between these organisations and bodies is crucial.

Norway welcomes the fact that goal number 14 on the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, sea and marine resources has been included as one of the new Sustainable Development Goals that were adopted at the UN summit in September 2015. We must now focus on how we can achieve this goal.