

Governing Sustainable Management of Resources in the Russian Arctic

Informational Governance



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This research studies state and non-state environmental arrangements in marine resource management, their interrelations and implications for conventional state-driven marine environmental regime.

Background

The Arctic climate is changing rapidly, opening up new opportunities for economic activities in the region. The Barents Sea has already witnessed the development of offshore petroleum activities, increased tanker traffic and maritime transport. These developments have resulted in greater pressure on marine biological resources. At the same time new marine protected areas have been established. Coordination of the various sectors and interests involved with an eye on preserving the good environmental state poses a formidable challenge. While Norway has addressed this challenge through the development of an ecosystem-based management plan for its part of the Barents Sea, the Russian Barents Sea lacks such coherent regulation and integrated environmental governance.

Novel governance approach: Informational governance

The products and services originating from the Russian Barents Sea are increasingly traded on international markets and consumed abroad. As a result, the international influence on production processes and resource management is growing. This implicates shifts in governance, where next to traditional state-based regulatory system novel non-state governance instruments are progressively steering economic activities and influence the way natural resources are managed. This project aims to analyse such governance novelties, referred to as Informational Governance, and assess their contribution to the sustainable management of marine resources in the Russian Barents Sea. Two thriving economic sectors are taken as examples: fisheries and the oil and gas sector.



Cloudberryes on the coast of the Barents Sea

Project highlights

- The Barents Sea in the Russian Arctic is subject to rapid economic development as a result of climate change and political prioritization
- The Russian Barents Sea lacks integrated marine environmental management, which puts at risk fragile ecosystems and activities dependent on biological resources, such as fisheries
- Non-state environmental arrangements are evolving next to conventional governmental regime, either as substitutes or complements



The Barents Sea region
(Source: GIWA, 2004)

Fisheries

Fisheries represent one of the important economic sectors in the Russian Barents Sea. More than 200 fish species from 70 families have been registered in the area, including commercially important species such as Northeast Arctic cod, Northeast Arctic haddock, Barents Sea capelin, and herring. These are also the key species in the Barents Sea food chain. Fisheries management in the Barents Sea has been administered since 1970s by the Joint Norwegian-Russian Fisheries Commission. Recently, however, a private certification scheme, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), has appeared in Russia aiming to add a premium economic value to the catch through assuring sustainable management practices.

The MSC certification is a prime example of a non-state governance arrangement, whereby verified information flows between fisheries and global consumers provide incentives for sustainable fisheries management as alternative or supplement to state-based management. Such arrangements seem particularly promising in situations where states lack the power, authority, capacity or experience to design, implement and enforce effective environmental regulation. However, the regional effects of such schemes may well depend on the institutional frameworks present. In the Barents Sea, a stable and effective international cooperation for marine resource management has been in place for decades. At the same time MSC certification is a recent phenomenon, the effects of which have not been explored. This study examines the fit of the private-based MSC instrument with the existing governmental framework as well as the added value of the label for sustainable fisheries and fishing communities in the Russian Barents Sea.



Haddock caught in the Barents Sea



Offshore oil and gas activities in the Barents Sea

Oil and gas sector

Lately, the Arctic has been attracting significant attention as a potentially important region for oil and gas activities. The Russian Barents Sea in this regard is vital due to its substantial proven fossil fuel reserves. The growing risk of oil spills during exploration, production or transportation, however, triggers environmental concerns. The greatest risks from oil activities are associated with near-shore areas, especially in ecologically valuable areas like the Pechora Sea, in the south-eastern part of the Barents Sea, with fragile ecosystem and great numbers of sensitive species.

State and corporate oil spill response systems in the Barents Sea region have been criticised by NGOs and scientists for their incompleteness. A clearly formulated state policy and coherent coordination among involved authorities are lacking, which most likely will reduce preparedness to combat oil spills. Neither the state oil companies have much experience of offshore operation in the harsh Arctic conditions. At the same time very little is currently known about the role of non-state actors.

The aim of this study is twofold. Firstly, it analyses the efforts of Russian scientists and NGOs encouraging planning activities at sea on the basis of ecosystem vulnerability mapping. Once integrated in the practice of oil and gas companies this tool may illustrate the shift towards ecosystem-based approach to management of resources. Secondly, the study investigates environmental performance of joint ventures consisting of Russian and foreign oil companies.

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