

LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF SEA RANCHING: THE NORWEGIAN EXPERIENCE AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

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Background

Important marine resources of fish and shellfish have historically been harvested along the coast of Norway. Likewise, efforts to produce juveniles for farming as well as release purposes have been made throughout the history. This finally resulted in a national sea-ranching programme (PUSH) that started in 1990. The programme aimed to elucidate biological, ecological, juridical and economical requirements for a new coastal industry based on sea ranching Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*), Arctic char (*Salvelinus alpinus*), Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*) and European lobster (*Homarus gammarus*). The long-term goal was to develop release and harvesting methods that are economically viable and ecologically justifiable. The overall conclusion in 1997 was that there was no biological or management basis to establish exclusive harvesting rights for fish. However, for lobster as well as great scallop (*Pecten maximus*) a new law to ensure harvesting rights was evaluated as needed in order to support and ensure sustainable development of sea ranching as an industry.

Act on Sea Ranching

When the Sea Ranching Act was approved in December 2000, it was in principle the first time Norway had granted permission for sea ranching. Permission for bottom culture had previously been granted under the Aquaculture Act, but not to any extent, and not in the way sea ranching is supposed to be without the use of cages, etc. The new principle was that a licence included the exclusive right to harvest the species in question for a geographic area, and not only the individuals that had been deliberately placed in the sea ranching area. The Norwegian legislation is a typical enabling act, which gives the framework for the industry it is supposed to control.

The management strategy of the Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs was to call for a gradual development. This was important since this represented a new conceptual use of the coastal area, and there were many objections, in particular from the organisations representing traditional fisheries. They feared that sea ranching would confiscate large areas that would exclude traditional fishing activities. There were also concerns about spreading diseases by releasing hatchery-produced juveniles.

When allocating licences, considerable emphasis are to be placed on the social benefits and adverse effects of the activities, including the role the activities will have in the regional business sector and the value of links with the local community. A necessary condition has been that other activities in the coastal zone shall not interrupt or damage the sea ranching industry.

Status 2006

Norwegian authorities decided that licenses should only be granted for European lobster and great scallop as a start. So far, less than twenty licenses have been allocated. By April 2004 there were in total 24 applications for sea ranching European lobster and great scallop. The applications were for 31 localities, 20 were for scallop and 11 for lobster. The applications extended from Tysfjord in the north to Risør in the south, and the separate applications varied from 0.001 to 21 km² in area. By the end of 2005, 3 licenses have been issued for lobster and 14 for scallop.

The administrative procedures in allocating the licenses were very slow, due to several unforeseen causes. Among others most of the sea ranchers wanted to use fences on the bottom for predation control. This caused problems with the coastal authorities because they feared that ships could destroy fences, dropping anchor nearby the sites resulting in claims for compensation in case of damages.

It has not been decided when the next set of licences will be allocated. The Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries has noted the huge interest in sea ranching, and believes it can be a profitable and sustainable industry in the future.