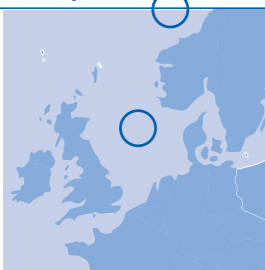


## Norway North Sea Saithe; Norway North-East Arctic Saithe



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DATE CERTIFIED	14 June 2008
SPECIES	North Sea saithe and North-east Arctic saithe (both <i>Pollachius virens</i> )
FISHING METHOD	Trawl, gill net, purse seine, Danish seine, handline
COUNTRY	Norway
LOCATION	
FISHERY TONNAGE	296,000 tonnes (both fisheries combined)

The North Sea; and the Norwegian Sea, within the Norwegian Exclusive Economic Zone

BETWEEN THEM, THESE two fisheries land well over quarter of a million tonnes of saithe – described by the Norwegian Seafood Export Council as “the fish lover’s fish” and “a well-kept secret among seafood aficionados”. Earlier this year, when white fish prices in Norway dropped sharply due to the global economic crisis, saithe bucked the trend. “Prices actually rose,” says Webjorn Barstad, Head of the White Fish Division of the Norwegian Fishing Vessel Owners Association, “and the feedback from exporters remained very positive. Now, as then, they just can’t sell enough MSC-certified saithe.”

How much of that is due to the MSC label, and how much due to thrift, is open to debate. “Saithe is also cheap,” Barstad says, “and the survivors in these times of crisis are the more affordable fish such as saithe and herring.”

### Ecological gains

The ecological gains from certification are more tangible, he reckons. Even though stocks are sustainably managed using strategies approved by ICES (the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea), some aspects of management at the national level require further improvement. “The recording and analysis of bycatch in the saithe fishery, particularly of PET (Protected, Endangered or Threatened) species, is not done in a systematic way in Norway,” Barstad says. Bycatch of sharks, skates, dab and seabirds is “reported to be low”, the certifier wrote in 2008. This conclusion is supported by the use of sorting grids and large mesh sizes which allow non-target species to escape. However, there was too little concrete information about bycatch, due to the way in which data is collected.

“We have a discard ban in Norway,” Barstad adds, “so you would probably see the composition of the catch through landing notes anyway. There is also a ‘reference fleet’ – 20 offshore vessels and 20 coastal fishing vessels

– doing sampling programmes on behalf of the Institute of Marine Research. They will have a fairly good idea of the composition of catches, but there is no robust statistical procedure for registering these commercially uninteresting species.”

One condition of MSC certification was that, within 12 months, sampling programmes should be initiated to estimate bycatch more scientifically, especially where PET species were concerned. “That is something we are now addressing,” Barstad says. “It will definitely lead to improvements in Norwegian management systems – as a direct result of MSC procedures.”

Another condition related to the impact of saithe fishing on cold-water coral reefs. Within three years, the fishery has to complete an assessment of the damage done to coral structures in ‘closure areas’ where trawlers are banned, to see if gill nets, purse seines and handlines have a negative effect.

### Mapping coral areas

“The Mareano Programme, co-ordinated by the Institute of Marine Research, is already mapping vast areas of the seabed,” Barstad says. “We are proposing that the Institute re-route research vessels to the coral closure areas, to see if static gear such as nets or lines has caused any depletion, reduction or damage to the reefs since the trawlers were banned,” he adds.

“We also wrote in our MSC action plan that we would be providing information on known coral structures from the fishermen, and conveying it to the Institute,” Barstad explains. “I sat down with a group of captains and we drew a map. All Norwegian vessels are now using electronic charts that are continually updated. By mapping all the coral areas, you will not hit them by mistake. If we can avoid shipwrecks or oil and gas installations, we can avoid coral reefs. All these things have evolved directly from the MSC conditions.”

“After Norwegian saithe became MSC certified in 2008, we experienced a considerable increase in demand – which, even now, is greater than the availability of fresh raw material”

Morten Hyldborg Jensen, Sales and Marketing Director, Aker Seafoods

“Meeting the conditions of MSC certification has had a very positive effect. There will definitely be improvements, even to Norwegian management systems – which are among the best in the world”

Webjorn Barstad, Norwegian Fishing Vessel Owners Association