

Photo: IMR

The "G.O. Sars" is one of the vessels used for the joint Norwegian-Russian surveys.



Fifty years of Norwegian-Russian scientific cooperation

The current cooperation between Norwegian and Russian marine scientists began fifty years ago, and on August 21–22, the Institute of Marine Research (IMR) and the Russian marine research institute Pinro in Murmansk, will hold a jubilee symposium in Tromsø to mark this half-century of collaboration.

BY INGOLF RØTTINGEN, HARALD GJØSÆTER AND BEATE HODDEVIK SUNNSET

The background for cooperation was the development of stocks of North-East Arctic cod and Norwegian spring-spawning herring in the fifties. Although both countries were members of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), which provides advice on resources management in the North Atlantic, need for even closer cooperation remained. In the 1950s, ICES did not advise on total outtakes of stocks; fish stocks were not regulated in this way at that time. The Barents Sea and the Norwegian Sea were open seas where everyone could fish as much as they wanted, and the concepts of economic zones and allocations of total quotas still lay 20–30 years in the future.

PROBLEMS OF UNRESTRICTED FISHING

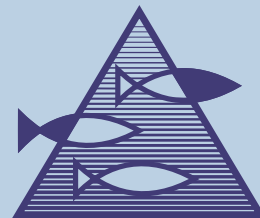
Nevertheless, the problems caused by unrestricted fishing were becoming obvious, and catches were becoming smaller. The data on age distribution of cod stocks suggested that the decline in catches

was due to overfishing rather than to natural oscillations. The Norwegian fishery for young herring was at issue: Soviet scientists thought that this fishery was the main reason for the decline in herring catches during the fifties. The Norwegians rejected this claim, since the nursery grounds of the strong herring year-classes were out in the open sea, where young herring were not being fished. There was scientific disagreement regarding analytical methods and the choice of year-classes for the analysis, which made it difficult to reach agreement. Both the Russians and the Norwegians therefore felt the need for better cooperation, and with that began the cooperation between the IMR and PINRO.

JOINT SURVEYS

Since then, joint efforts have been extended and deepened, for example via joint surveys. The 0-group surveys that started in 1965 have since become a part of the autumn ecosystem





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survey which assesses the spawning success of all Barents Sea stocks. It provides what is probably the longest continuous survey series used by ICES and is important to make prognoses of fish. As cooperative efforts have evolved, annual meetings have been held within oceanography, biology and technology.

One very important factor in the cooperation was the introduction of economic zones, and as a consequence of these, the establishment of the Mixed Norwegian-Russian Fisheries Commission. Currently, the main emphasis for Norwegian and Russian scientists is to agree on matters the Commission deals with, particularly as regards stock development and quota recommendations. Without a joint set of recommendations from Norwegian and Russian scientists, it is difficult for the Commission to adopt effective resolutions. However, the work of the Fisheries Commission is evolving, and Norwegian and Russian scientists now collaborate on long-term strategies, catch regulations and ecosystem management, rather than simply obtaining figures for the following year's quota recommendations. Also the work of the more recent Norwegian-Russian Environmental Commission is likely to affect the cooperation.

A key element in the cooperation is the annual scientific meeting, where 10–20 Norwegian researchers meet their Russian colleagues to address questions raised by the Fisheries Commission. Joint surveys are also organised,

the most extensive of these being the above mentioned ecosystem survey in August–September, in which three Norwegian and two Russian vessels take part. A joint Norwegian-Russian report is published in the wake of this cruise. The cooperation also covers exchanges of otoliths and annual meetings dedicated to age determinations of important fish species. Since 1983, Norwegian-Russian symposia have been organised at intervals of one to three years.

INTERNATIONAL QUALITY CONTROL

Although most of the data on important fish stocks in the Arctic are collected by Norwegian and Russian scientists, the large quantities of information are processed under the auspices of ICES, particularly by the Arctic Fisheries and Northern Pelagic working groups. Within ICES, both Russian and Norwegian scientists work towards a joint understanding of models and input data, while the international quality control is provided by ICES. ICES is thus a cornerstone of the Norwegian-Russian cooperation.

At the jubilee meeting in Tromsø, the scientists will summarise some of the results obtained and understandings reached in the course of 50 years of cooperation between IMR and PINRO. They will also be looking ahead, anticipating a trend towards different types of ecosystem studies and more cooperating partners. For this reason, institutions from several other countries have been invited to make presentations at the meeting.

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RESEARCH GROUPS

Demersal fish
Pelagic fish

