

Be cautious about generalizations

This is a response to an article in *SAMUDRA Report No. 34* on the management of North Atlantic cod stocks

We would like to refer to the article in *SAMUDRA Report No. 34* of March 2003, entitled *Something has gone wrong*.

The article in itself is interesting, but it may also, at least at first glance, give the impression that the management of the cod stocks at large in the North Atlantic has failed. With respect to the most important cod stock in Norwegian waters, the Northeast Arctic cod, the situation is, in fact, very different. The spawning stock biomass of this stock is within safe biological limits, according to the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).

We are concerned about generalizations when it comes to the status of fish stocks. We hasten to say that in your article you clearly mention the Common Fisheries Policy and the North Sea, so for the enlightened reader it would be clear that it is a specific area of the North Atlantic and a specific stock of cod that is being considered. However, many people will probably only notice the terms 'North Atlantic' and 'cod', without knowing the distinction to other cod stocks in other parts of the North Atlantic and under different management regimes.

As you yourself will know, there is an increased tendency to include species and stocks of fish and other (marine) organisms in lists indicating their endangered status. Certification of whether a fish stock or species is being harvested in a sustainable way is used in marketing, and affects consumer opinion.

A very important principle in fisheries management is that this should be based on the best scientific knowledge available. This, therefore, requires differentiation in approach according to the actual

situation, including management on a stock-by-stock basis according to the characteristics of the stock. Thus, different stocks of the same species might be in completely different situations. 3

This response comes from Ann Kristin Westberg, Deputy Director General and Brit Fiskness, Senior Advisor, Det Kongelige, Fisheriedepartement (postmottak@fid.dep.no), Government of Norway