



FACTSHEET

The natural treasures of Lofoten

No oil in Lofoten!

The Norwegian archipelago of Lofoten is famous for its mountains, fjords and beaches and the richness of the ecosystem in the sea surrounding the islands. The area holds unique cold water reefs, pods of sperm whales and killer whales, some of the largest seabird colonies in Europe as well as being the spawning grounds of the largest remaining cod stock in the world.

WWF is campaigning to protect the sea areas off Lofoten and the neighbouring archipelago Vesterålen from petroleum exploration. In 2010, the Norwegian government will make a decision on whether to open the area for petroleum activities. Searching for and producing petroleum present a huge risk to the environment in the area.

Fish

The waters around Lofoten support important fisheries and a diverse selection of species, both commercial stocks and species less well known. The area is important for ground fish like cod and haddock and species such as halibut, wolffish, ling, tusk and redfish. The Northeast Arctic cod – by far the world's largest cod stock – spawn off the Lofoten islands. The stock supports a large fishery of 400,000 metric tonnes annually, hugely important for the seafood industry in Lofoten and many other fishing communities along the coast of the Barents Sea. Herring also spawn in the area, and at times of the year make up the largest biomass in the world.

Sea mammals

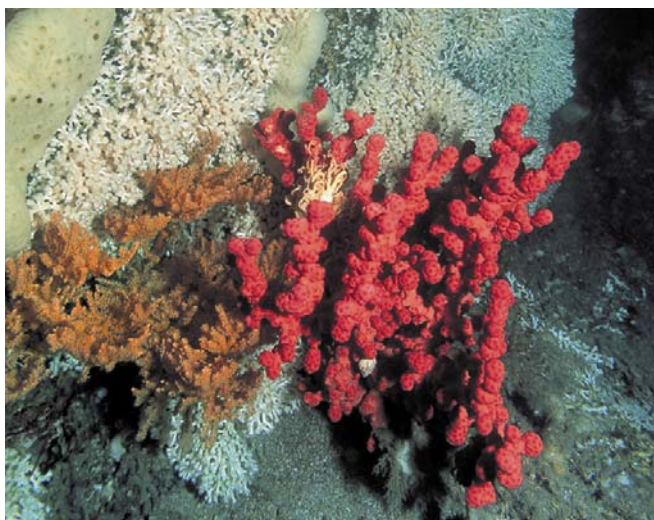
Lofoten is an important area for marine mammals. Both grey seal and common seal breed along the coast. Killer whales spend the winter here, usually arriving in late fall. During December and January they breed and calve. Along the coast of the archipelago, sperm whales, fin whales and minke whales are a common sight.



Killer whales. © WWF-Canon/William W. ROSSITER.

Coral reefs and sea bed

Along the continental brake there are large coral reefs, sponge communities and a rich sea bed fauna. Cold water reefs are among the richest habitats in European waters. *Lophelia* reefs are biodiversity hot-spots on the sea floor. The Røst reef is the world's largest known *Lophelia* reef – 45 km long and 3 km wide. Along the coast, there are major kelp forests, providing food and shelter for many fish and other species.



Lophelia reefs in Lofoten. © WWF / Erling Svensen.

Seabirds

The Lofoten Islands are important breeding and wintering grounds for huge numbers of seabirds. 28 different species nest here every year, and many species use the area as winter habitat. On Røst island you will find mainland Europe's largest colony of Atlantic puffin. There are also important colonies of common guillemot and European shag.



King Eider. © John Stenersen.

Threats from the petroleum industry

New petroleum licenses will increase Norway's oil production, and hence global emissions of climate gases. WWF opposes opening up of new areas on the Norwegian continental shelf for oil exploration.

Production and transportation of oil always involve a risk of oil spills. Arctic waters have rough weather conditions and limited daylight in winter. This increases the risk of accidents and makes rescue and clean-up operations even more challenging.

A large oil spill in this region may have dramatic consequences for the wildlife in the area.

Seabirds are especially vulnerable to oil spills, but oil is also lethal to fish eggs and larvae and may have huge effects on recruitment and on the state of fish stocks. The petroleum industry is an additional threat in a situation when climate change is already being observed in the Arctic. Warmer oceans have unknown consequences for the marine ecosystems.

Norway has some of the world's largest and most productive sea areas and some of the most diverse marine life in the Arctic. With this comes a responsibility to manage the living marine resources in a sustainable manner.

Oil has made Norway one of the richest countries in the world. But there is no such thing as a risk free oil production. Some areas should never be exploited. Lofoten is one such area.

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