

Sognefjord: Near Death

peter blok photography 2013

The oceans are being emptied by extremely large fishing vessels. But not only commercial fishermen have a major impact on the marine environment. Even the fishing tourist in an inflatable boat has an important impact on the fish stocks. In Norway for the first time, the effects of large-scale sport fishing in saltwater is getting clearly visible in the fjords in the south of this, for its abundance of fish famous, anglers paradise.

This is a film about the reduction in fish stocks and its possible causes in the coastal waters and fjords of Norway. In particular, the film looks at the striking decline in the size of fish-catches in the Sognefjord.

Is Norway's longest and deepest fjord (205 km long and up to 1,308 m deep) being completely emptied of fish due to over-fishing? Over the last twenty years, fishing tourists and locals have noticed a decline of 70% or more in some parts of the fjord. The Esefjord, a branch of the Sognefjord, well known for harbouring abnormally large quantities of a particular (and very popular) species of herring in summer, hasn't seen one herring in the past three years. The film discusses the possible causes for this. Scientists have also noticed a decline in the Sognefjord.

What are the possible causes of these declining numbers? Is climate change having a major influence? Or is it due to the many power stations? Or the number of fish caught professionally? Or the salmon farms? And what has been the effect of the rapid expansion of the marine fishing tourism industry over the past few years (which has given rise to many studies in recent years)? Fishing by tourists has been strictly regulated since 2006 and even more so in 2010.

*"In Norway, recreational angling is an important part of the tourism industry, and may contribute significantly to the fishing mortality of targeted species."
From: the thesis *Marine Angling Tourism in Norway: The Interactions between Behavior, Management and Catch* by Keno Ferter, University of Bergen/ Institute of Marine Research (2011).*

It is striking that record numbers of fish have been caught in the Sognefjord over the last few years, which is very probably also due to much-improved fishing techniques at increasingly greater depths. Does this mean that we are in this way permanently closing down the last production facilities for posterity?

The film records the answers to these questions and shows:

- The beauty of the Norwegian fjords.
- The remaining members of the community of German pensioners in the camping ground in Dragsvik who stay there from May to October and who have experienced the decline in fish stocks over the last twenty till thirty years. We film and interview them while they go fishing; they talk about the now past abundant fish-numbers. The film also shows fish being caught during filming; the numbers were small but some fish were impressive, for example a hake

measuring almost one metre. An angler explains in the film how he caught a halibut measuring 1.95 metres and weighing 100 kilograms in 2008; this is illustrated with amateur video shots. An other angler explains how he caught a fish measuring 1.75 metres in length; this is also shown in a newspaper clip.

- The film shows interviews with two scientists at the 47th European Marine Biology Symposium in Årendal in September 2012. They noticed trends in fish numbers but, due to the complexity of the subject (and possibly due to political consequences) are unable to make any definitive statements.

The interviews and these trends are illustrated by the following:

- The influence in the Storfjord of the feeding in the salmon farms on the catches by tourists of large quantities of very fat coalfish in the nearby area .
- In a branch of the Hardangerfjord, local, i.e. non-professional, fishermen use nets to catch fish in the traditional way for their own consumption.
- Some frames show the fishing tourists at camping grounds in the south of Norway (Risør, Skødje and Måndalen). Over the past few years, catches have been larger due to a somewhat colder period in the Skagerrak and therefore a (temporary?) increase in the amount of food for the fish, which shows that the water temperature has a strong influence. Many (and large!) fish are caught and processed to take home.

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