



Norwegian Ornithological Society (NOF)

Sandgata 30 B
NO-7012 Trondheim
Norway

e-mail: nof@birdlife.no internet: www.birdlife.no

Phone: (+ 47) 73 84 16 40
Bank: 4358.50.12840
Org.nb.: 970 089 748 NVA

Ramsar Convention

Rue Mauverney 28
CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland
ramsar@ramsar.org

Your ref.	Your contact person	Our ref.	Our contact person	Date
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Concerns regarding proposed dredging within Ramsar site 1197 (Tanamunningen)

Since 2016, BirdLife Norway have been actively engaged in campaigning against an extensive planned encroachment within the Tana Estuary (Tanamunningen) nature reserve and Ramsar site. The Norwegian Coastal Administration (*Kystverket*) plan to dredge the strait in to Austertana where there is a quartzite quarry, thereby allowing larger ships to sail into Leirpollfjorden. BirdLife Norway have previously had discussions with both The Norwegian Coastal Administration, the County Governor of Finnmark (*Fylkesmannen i Finnmark*) and the Norwegian Environment Agency (*Miljødirektoratet*) regarding this matter, and have previously sent in comments to the programme plan. The Norwegian Coastal Administration are currently preparing a description of actions and of their consequences.

The regulations for the Tana Estuary nature reserve state that “*extraction, infilling, levelling and storage of mass*” is not permitted, although this prohibition shall not hinder “*necessary dredging*” of the shipping channel to Giemasnjarg (where there is a quay used for transport of quartzite). The current proposal involves more than simply “*necessary dredging*” due to the shipping lane becoming narrower or shallower, and is instead a new form of encroachment requiring exemption from the reserve regulations.

Tana Estuary Ramsar site

The Tana Estuary nature reserve was established in 1991, with the aim of protecting the largest intact river estuary in the whole of Norway. The reserve has Ramsar status, and is the most important area for piscivorous and other diving ducks in Norway. Between 25,000 and 30,000 Goosander *Mergus merganser*, as well as large numbers of Red-breasted Merganser *M. serrator* and Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* are regularly recorded here. The delta is a biologically highly productive area and is used by a variety of waterbirds for moulting and wintering, and is a staging site for waterbirds during both spring and autumn passage. The reserve also has status as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA).

One important reason for affording the area protection is the intact geomorphological conditions. During flooding, large volumes of sediments are deposited along sandbanks towards the estuary mouth. The Tana Estuary is the largest intact delta area in the whole of Norway and the most dynamic in the country. Sand Eel *Ammodytes sp.* is a key species in the area, particularly as prey for birds. The Norwegian Coastal Administration have extracted numerous samples from where they wish to dredge. Every single one of these samples contained Sand Eels. Sand Eels spend the hours of darkness buried in sand in shallow water,

and forage in large shoals after animal plankton, fish eggs and fish larvae. Sand Eels hibernate in the sand during winter. The Coastal Administration have not identified which Sand Eel species is present in the estuary, and there are currently 18 different species of Sand Eel recorded in Norway. Knowledge is also lacking as to whether Sand Eels hibernate in the estuary, when they spawn, or when the young Sand Eels hatch.

The government have provided funding towards dredging

The Norwegian government have provided funding to the project despite the fact that an environmental impact assessment is not yet available, and without following normal procedures, with subsequent comments and advice from environmental bodies. According to the preliminary budget from the Ministry of Transport for 2020, a total of NOK 25.8 million are proposed used to improve the shipping lane to the quartzite quarry in the inner part of Leirpollen. The total cost for the whole project is estimated to be around NOK 124 million, and large sums have already been provided from previous national budgets.

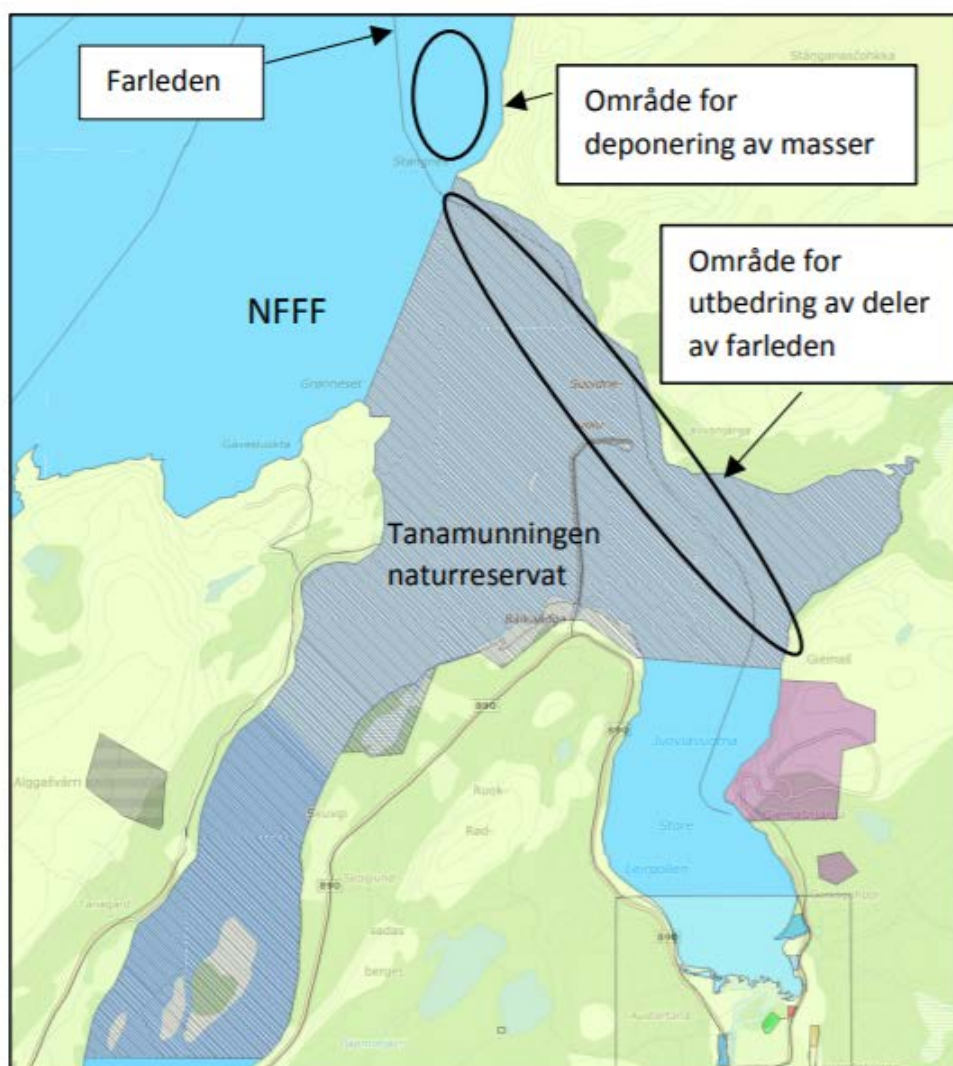


Figure 1. Grey: Tana estuary nature reserve. Pink: Quartzite quarry. Long, thin oval: area where dredging is planned. Circle: planned dumping ground. The shipping lane (farleden) is also shown as a thin grey line.

BirdLife Norway question the need for dredging

The Norwegian Coastal Administration have stated to BirdLife Norway that boats travelling to and from the quartzite quarry are not fully loaded whilst sailing along this shipping channel due to safety limits and due to the water depth. This is the main reason why the Coastal Administration want to make the channel deeper. Claims that the channel has become shallower and narrower are however difficult to substantiate. Depth measurements have been carried out in 2011 as well as later, but we do not have access to such data. At the time of writing, ships have passed at least 5,500 times on their way in, and out again at least 5,500 times, during the past 40 years or so, without a single accident.

As we understand it, the planned dredging will be in a channel 150 metres wide and 9 metres deep. The channel is also to be straightened. Such an operation may result in an increase in speed in tidal flow, with more difficult conditions for crustaceans and small fish as a result. Proposed excavation work on the sandbank at Kobbsanda will alter the natural environment there, thus affecting the biological conditions in the area. The total volume of material that is planned to be removed is 400,000 m³. This is equivalent to 50,000 truckloads that need to be dumped. A spawning ground for Sand Eels have been recorded close to the planned dumpsite.



Figure 2: Kobbsanda is important both to birds, to seals, and is an important area for Copepods, which in turn are the most important food for sand eels.

BirdLife Norway are extremely concerned as to the short-term and long-term consequences these proposed geomorphological changes will have upon the landscape, sedimentary conditions and marine life. Changes in sediments could have negative effects. Copepods and other marine animals may be affected by fine particles in the water. We are of the opinion that there is a big risk for negative changes to the ecological character of the Ramsar site. To what extent there might be a need for maintenance dredging, is unknown.

The proposed encroachments will affect the very conservation values that the area's bird fauna represents. BirdLife Norway therefore request that the Ramsar Convention discuss this situation with Norwegian authorities.

On behalf of BirdLife Norway

Kjetil Aa. Solbakken

Kjetil Aa. Solbakken, CEO.

Attachments:

Comments to the plan programme from BirdLife Norway and SABIMA (Norwegian version)

Copy:

Norwegian Environment Agency
Ministry of Climate and the Environment
Ministry of Transport
The Norwegian Coastal Administration