



## Report to the Storting on Svalbard:

# Svalbard policy entering a new era

The overarching objectives of Svalbard policy are:

- **Consistent and firm enforcement of Norwegian sovereignty**
- **Correct adherence to the Svalbard Treaty and verification of compliance with the Treaty**
- **Maintenance of calm and stability**
- **Preservation of the area's unique natural wilderness.**
- **Maintenance of Norwegian communities in the archipelago**

There is broad political agreement on these objectives, which have remained firm for a long time. History has shown that administering the archipelago according to these objectives has been a success.

### A steady course for Svalbard policy

The aim of the Report to the Storting is to set guidelines for Svalbard policy for a number of years going forward. They envision a continued stable and predictable exercise of authority and beneficial social developments in the archipelago. At the same time it is important to retain the necessary manoeuvring room in order to meet new challenges and employ the policy instruments most suitable at any given time in administering the archipelago.

### A clear environmental profile

Preserving the area's unique natural wilderness is one of the main objectives of Norway's Svalbard policy, and protection of the natural environment is one of the key policies. Svalbard's uniqueness is something that the Government feels a great responsibility for protecting.

### Svalbard and the High North strategy

The High North is this Government's most important strategic priority. Svalbard is a key part of the High North, and the Svalbard report is a crucial addition to the Government's High North Strategy. Continued effective and appropriate administration of Svalbard will help to strengthen and expand our presence in the High North.

### Climate change – challenges and opportunities

Climate change will present new challenges. Temperatures in the Arctic are expected to rise twice as fast as the global mean.

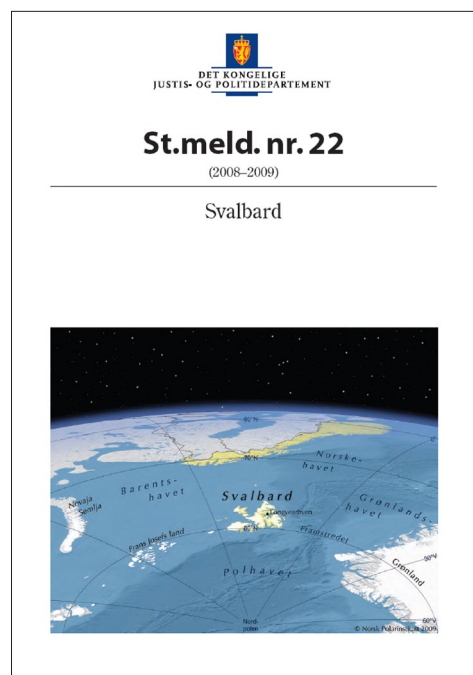
This may lead to sweeping changes in the physical environment and have serious consequences for species and ecosystems in Svalbard.

At the same time, climate change presents opportunities and expectations of increased activity in the north. A warmer Arctic Ocean will mean that fisheries activities will move northward.

Less ice may also open up new routes for international shipping between east and west. For example, Longyearbyen may become increasingly important as a base for rescue and pollution clean-up operations in the polar oceans. Even now, satellite data obtained by the Svalbard Satellite Station is used in operational monitoring of sea ice conditions, oil spills and ship traffic, and there is reason to believe that Longyearbyen may become an even more important platform for monitoring ship traffic in the polar basin.

### Normalisation – increased need for regulation

The Government emphasises that the legal framework for Svalbard is to be as much like that on the mainland as pos-



sible. A number of circumstances, especially the fact that Longyearbyen is developing in the direction of similar local communities on the mainland, make this desirable. Even so, special circumstances mean a need for case-by-case assessment of whether and in what way laws are to apply to Svalbard. For example, welfare and entitlement legislation will have to be assessed in light of the Svalbard Treaty's establishment of equal rights to access and residence in the archipelago by citizens of parties to the treaty. And Longyearbyen is not intended to be a "cradle-to-grave" community or offer services on the same level as mainland municipalities.

### **Svalbard and scientific research**

Svalbard has become a key area for gathering data on what happens when temperatures in the Arctic rise and how this may impact the global climate. This underscores the importance of making full use of the opportunities afforded by Svalbard as a platform for Norwegian and international climate and environmental research.

In Longyearbyen the establishment of the University Centre in (UNIS) has helped to boost educational offerings. UNIS has also developed into an increasingly important part of the local community in Longyearbyen. In addition there are the activities of such institutions as Kings Bay AS in Ny-Ålesund and the Norwegian Polar Institute as well as substantial investment in infrastructure. Going forward, Longyearbyen and Ny-Ålesund will also be the natural points of departure for research and instruction based on the unique advantages of the archipelago. It is crucial to ensure that the infrastructure in Svalbard is used efficiently and to enhance the collaboration between institutions.

Efforts connected with International Polar Year (IPY 2007-2009) have strengthened Svalbard as a research platform. Managing the legacy of IPY in the best possible manner is a key challenge.

### **Coal mining and other industrial activity**

One of the main objectives of Svalbard policy is to maintain Norwegian communities in the archipelago. The existence of a family community in Longyearbyen fulfils this objective.

The Government attaches importance to Longyearbyen continuing to be a high-quality family community. Coal mining continues to be the mainstay of this community. It

is the Government's assessment that coal mining should continue within the strict framework set by environmental legislation and commercial profitability, in a manner that supports Store Norske's objective contribute to a robust community in Longyearbyen. Existing infrastructure for coal mining activities should be used as much as possible.

At the same time, coal mining is not a sustainable activity. It is also vulnerable to fluctuations in the price of coal. Unforeseen events may have a serious impact on operations. In view of this, the Government believes that an effort should be made to develop other activities, such as knowledge, research and teaching as well as tourism and other varied activities.

### **Tourism**

Today, the tourism industry is an important basis for settlement and activity in Longyearbyen, and a targeted effort on more year-round offerings may boost the importance of this business. Tourism also helps to spread knowledge of the vulnerable environment and environmental challenges in the Arctic. The Government also wants to facilitate development of tourism as a basic industry in Svalbard, within a strict environmental safety framework.

### **Protecting the wilderness**

Preserving Svalbard's unique natural wilderness is one of the main objectives of Norway's Svalbard policy. Total traffic in Svalbard has risen in step with the increase in activities in the past decade. Growth has been fastest in ship traffic, tourism and research. To limit the strain on Svalbard's geological, botanical and cultural monuments, traffic needs to be controlled in a manner in conformance with the value and vulnerability of – and reasons for preserving – the various areas. This pertains especially within the nature reserves in eastern Svalbard, which will assume increasing importance as reference areas for climate research going forward.

The further effort to improve marine safety will be an important task for the Government. The formulation of management plans and amendments to the environmental protection regulations will be key instruments for controlling traffic and limiting the overall strain on the environment in keeping with the objectives of the regulations. In order to implement effective measures it is vital to continue the effort to increase our knowledge of how traffic impacts the environment in Svalbard.