

## Research as the basis for decision-making in reindeer husbandry

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As you know, I am no specialist in reindeer husbandry. Nor do I have sufficient *academic* background to give any expert opinion on the significance of scientific research for the reindeer industry. But for many years as a politician and, now, as chairman of both the Steering Committee for Reindeer Husbandry and the Reindeer Industry Development Fund, I have been involved in making decisions which directly and indirectly have wide reaching consequences for this fine industry. It is from this standpoint that I make my remarks on the significance of research (and technical advice).

First, a deep sigh: if only we had established a qualitatively and quantitatively much stronger program of reindeer research much earlier! Had we done this, several important decisions which have had to have been made could have been based on solid scientific fact. This has not been the case. The amount of guesswork involved in *today's* decision-making could have been substituted with knowledge – knowledge about good alternative strategies for reindeer husbandry. I am speaking here, for example, of land disposition, of exploitation of pasture, of winter fodders besides lichen, of the environmental consequences of different types of management and of meat quality.

Of course, we do know something of these things – both from experience of the reindeer owners themselves and from research. But we know nothing like enough.

We know, for example, that today there are 3000 healthy Norwegian reindeer on South Georgia. This population has grown from 22 animals, which were taken there during the

years between the wars (*sic*), despite the fact that there are no lichens on South Georgia. It is very important that we find out what winter fodders besides lichens may exist here at home, too. I am happy to learn that this is currently being investigated.

Knowledge about diet preferences and the nutritional requirements of reindeer in winter will be of fundamental importance for making decisions with regard to reindeer numbers, land disposition, channelling economic resources and so on.

The principal challenge for Norwegian reindeer husbandry in Finnmark today – seen from the viewpoint of both the central political authorities and the industry itself – is disequilibrium between the number of reindeer and their forage resources. Productivity is low, the economy is worse and a large number of reindeer owners have an unsatisfactory number of animals and an unsatisfactory income. The animals are becoming smaller and smaller. Social and economic problems are increasing. There is an obvious danger of long term damage to the pasture areas. *How* long term, nobody knows. There are no clear research results to guide us but, I am glad to say, research is under way and satellite imagery represents a good, new tool.

When researchers can supply answers to the questions I have mentioned above, it will be easier, not least for the Steering Committee for Reindeer Husbandry, to define both total and regional permitted maximum numbers for reindeer. It will also be easier for reindeer owners to accept the need to reduce the number of ani-

mals. But, of course, we all hope that research in reindeers' nutritional requirements, in diet selection and in pasture will reveal new options by which we can avoid having to reduce the number of animals.

Today, however, we have no alternative but to insist that numbers be reduced. It is no simple matter to achieve this. Many reindeer owners are strongly opposed to it.

Many people wonder whether the reindeer Saami might not themselves know best. Surely, they well understand that it is not the number of animals but the number of kilos of meat produced, its quality and its price that matters?

Yes, they understand this. But they are worried that «if I reduce the size of my herd, my neighbour will increase the size of his». And so they remain sceptical that any local reduction in numbers will result in any rapid and satisfactory increase in productivity. There are some experimental results, as well as examples from husbandry in other parts of the country, which suggest that productivity can be increased in this way. But the Saami in Finnmark remain unconvinced that it will work for them.

But, of course, productivity is affected not merely by the number of animals present. Herd structure (age, sex composition etc.) also has an important influence. This has been demonstrated in Professor Dag Lenvik's dissertation. In addition, animal health (treatment against parasites) is important. Research has come a long way in this field. And all these factors interact.

But, above all else, there is *one* challenge that must be mastered besides research: technical advice and supervision!

Advances in research contribute little unless the results are used. I am very pleased, therefore, that the Reindeer Husbandry Research Committee and Reindeer Husbandry Advisory Council are to be combined. Research and tech-

nical advice will go hand in hand in the future. The reindeer industry suffers from barriers of both language and culture. We are plagued, besides, by a deep mistrust of bureaucracy including, in this instance, research and advisory services.

According to the Statutes of Reindeer Husbandry in Norway, the industry shall give: «Secure economic and social conditions for those who practice reindeer husbandry and shall protect reindeer husbandry which is an important component of the culture of the Saami people».

But a lame reindeer industry which generates insecurity instead of security, which in some areas produces a social slum instead of welfare, is anything other than a positive factor in Saami culture.

Of course, it is the industry itself which, together with the political and administrative apparatus, must find solutions to its problems. The role of research is to provide us with an alternative strategy which can turn reindeer husbandry into a secure way of life for as many as possible. You must give us knowledge and advice – we must be cleverer at using them.

Of course, research must have a free hand – but it cannot be fully independent. Researchers must try to direct their activities towards providing both the industry and the politicians with a solid basis on which to base their decisions. It is therefore my hope that «productive» research receives as high priority as possible. With limited funding available for research and the relatively small size of the industry, it is important that *its* requirements and *its* own demands for help from researchers be attended to. This, besides anything else, results in building up confidence in research and, consequently, in acceptance and application of research results.

*Which is precisely our aim!*