

Norway's 'most modern crab plant' closed as opilio quota launched

By [Neil Ramsden](#)

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 Snow crab catches. Credit: Arctic Catch website

Norway [announced a 4,000-metric-ton](#) snow crab quota on June 20, but changes to fishery access in 2017 mean the country's most modern plant lies idle, with many of its employees out of work.

Since September 2016, Seagourmet Norway's factory in Batsfjord, Finnmark has been closed, the company's chairman, Nikita Sinianskii, told *Undercurrent News*.

"The latest situation is the same -- the biggest and newest crab factory in Norway remains closed, and economically at the edge."

As of Jan. 1 2017 negotiations between Norway and Russia over the Barents Sea crab fishery saw the former excluded from the 'Loophole' area in which both had previously fished.

Also excluded were EU vessels, including those from Latvia which had supplied several Norwegian crab plants. It is thought Russia did this as too many vessels were fishing in the area, and it wants to come up with a management plan before the stocks are overfished.

Norwegian ministers maintain hope that once a management plan is in place, access to the fishery may be allowed again.

On June 23 Sinianskii told *Undercurrent* the only two people working in the Seagourmet plant were he and his production manager. He claimed between 50 and 100 people had lost their jobs with the factory's closure -- "huge for a town like Batsfjord, with a population of 2,200".

"The reason [for the plant's closure] is the same as why Norwegian fishermen can no longer catch snow crab in the Loophole -- the policy of the fisheries minister, which gave all the snow crab to the Russians," he said. The Loophole is managed by the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission.



Seagourmet at Seafood Expo Global 2016, with Sinianskii far right

"This question is only about Norwegian politicians. Since September 2016 we are waiting for any solutions from the Norwegian fishery authorities, but up until now all our proposals are rejected."

In 2016 -- before being forced to close in September -- the plant had handled 1,500 metric tons of live crab, he said. "The factory was designed and built specifically for crab processing, so there is no opportunity to jump for fish processing, for example."

Seagourmet's main supplier of live snow crab was Latvian firm North Star SIA, which has been unable to fish this year. It was also one of this company's vessels which was arrested by Norway in [January](#), for the supposed illegal catching of snow crab on the Norwegian shelf in the Svalbard fishery protection zone.

Seagourmet has been able to handle some king crab instead, but this was only ever a small addition to its snow crab business, Sinianskii said. "To keep many workers only for a few hours per week or a few days in a month is economically a bad idea."

As for the possibility of buying snow crab from Norwegian vessels, he noted these are mainly processing on board, "and our attempt to attract Norwegian vessels to deliver crab to our factory have failed".

Batsfjord mayor Geir Knutsen told *Undercurrent* he was unsure of the government's plans in terms of fishery negotiations, but that "we hope there will be a positive solution for Seagourmet and Batsfjord".

Arctic Catch relies on its Wolf

Another Norwegian plant -- like Seagourmet, operated by Russian managers -- has also experienced issues with fishery changes in 2017, though to a less debilitating degree.

Vardo, Finnmark-based Arctic Catch had also been receiving some small volumes of snow crab from Latvian vessels, before they were disallowed.

Its most modern vessel, the Arctic Wolf, has been prevented from fishing in the Loophole region, following Russia's move to exclude other countries' vessels. "Too many vessels, mainly Russian and EU, were involved in the snow crab fishery in 2015-2016 in that small area," CFO Konstantin Vasilenko told *Undercurrent*.

"Catches dropped down critically, so for m/v Arctic Wolf it was not reasonable to stay with that. So for us the ban was good news, and we started operation of m/v Arctic Wolf again in 2017, but fishing in the Svalbard area."

Catches here are "twice less compared to the Loophole", but Russia's ban and a decrease in volumes from other areas, such as Canada, have pushed market prices up, said Vasilenko.

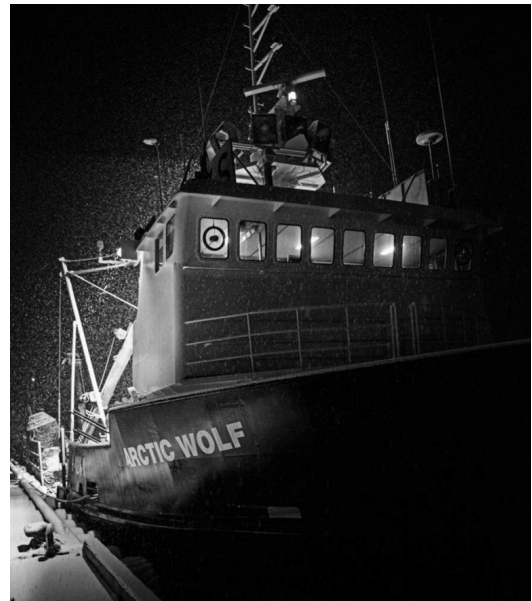
Arctic Wolf had been out of action since September 2015 as part of routine maintenance and classification, he explained.

"We actually have not stopped the factory in Vardo, because we have other activities like fish and king crab," he added. The firm's main markets are Japan, South Korea, the US and Europe.

Snow crab remains around 15-20% of Arctic Catch's total turnover. At present the firm continues to operate as it can, "hoping the Norwegian authorities will implement the regulation of snow crab fishery, that will help to have a sustainable business".

"Quota regulation is what we expected. Setting of the fishing rules, together with quota, will give an opportunity to make plans or to have better evaluation, and that is positive for a business. We expect some growth within the range of three years," he said.

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📷 Credit: Arctic Catch

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