



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Conductor Jan Helge Trøen of Den Norske Opera & Ballett guides the Longyearbyen Mixed Choir and vocalists from the mainland through a rehearsal of "Messiah" this week at Huset. Soloists and a composite orchestra from the mainland will also join the choir for Saturday's performance.

# A new high for oil

*Norway proposing to allow oil drilling as far north as Bjørnøya, alarming environmentalists*

By MARK SABBATINI  
Editor

Oil drilling as far north as Bjørnøya and the Svalbard Fisheries Protection Zone is being proposed in the Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum and Energy's latest round of licensing blocks.

The 61 blocks, 34 of which are in waters bordering Russia and 20 in other parts of the Barents Sea, include areas reaching an all-time high in latitude including four at 73 degrees north, the same height as Bjørnøya and the fisheries zone. Drilling has also never taken place along the Norwegian-Russian maritime borderline.

The list of new blocks comes after 40 energy companies early this year nominated a total of 160 desired blocks in northern Norwegian waters, according to the *Barents Observer*. The license round is scheduled to take place in the first half of 2014.

"The blocks include the least-known areas on the (Norwegian) shelf where the likelihood  
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# HIGH 'MESSIAH'

*Record-length work on local production culminates Saturday with performers from mainland*

By MARK SABBATINI  
Editor

George Frideric Handel composed the 259-page score for "Messiah" in 24 days. Anne Lise Sandvik has been preparing its northernmost-ever performance for the past year and a half – which she believes is a record timespan for a local production.

"I think maybe the architects who are drawing the buildings are a bit quicker than the people who build them up," she said.

"They have to build up the foundation, make sure it the building is solid and decorate it with nice things."

Dozens of locals who began rehearsing as early as last summer will be joined by vocalists and instrumentalists from Den Norske Opera & Ballett and the Army Staff Band in Oslo when Handel's three-hour oratorio finally reaches the stage at 6:30 p.m. Saturday at Huset. Sandvik, who began planning the production after seeing a promotion on Facebook, said its length and complexity raised a lot of doubts.

"The first time we started I asked myself 'What are you doing?'" she said. But she said

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# Alcohol laws about to get tipsy

*Proposals allowing manufacture of alcohol and ending rationing may be enacted within months*

By MARK SABBATINI  
Editor

Robert Johansen has spent four years trying to get permission to open a microbrewery in Longyearbyen. Now it appears he won't just succeed at overturning Svalbard's 85-year-old ban on alcohol production, but will change the archipelago's entire alcohol-rationing system.

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Signs warning shoppers at Nordpolet about Svalbard's laws limiting alcohol purchases may disappear within months, along with an 85-year-old ban on manufacturing alcohol locally.

## Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

### Editor

Mark Sabbatini

### Principal of principles

Kristan Hutchison

### Psychiatrist

Irene Gallion

### Accomplice

Jeff Newsom

### Mailing address

*Icepeople*  
Vei 210 -2- 13  
Longyearbyen, Svalbard  
9170  
Norway

### Telephone

Norway: +47 41 51 46 38  
U.S. +1 (970) 673-4472

### E-mail

marksabbatini@yahoo.com

### Web site

www.icepeople.net

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## Corrections policy

When we screw up you'll know about it – on the front page. One of the big complaints about newspapers is they tend to bury corrections and clarifications deep inside where few people who read the original article see them. If we need to fix something, an alert box on the front page will state what story is in error and where the full correction is printed.

## Submitting material

Letters, columns, photos and other material are welcome, but we can't offer pay for published items since nobody here is getting paid at the moment. Submissions in electronic form (text, Word documents, JPEGs, etc.) are highly preferred, although typing and/or scanning of items will be considered on a per-case basis. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, accuracy, libel and other reasons, but we will also make every reasonable effort to contact the author about any changes prior to publication.

## 'Smells like oil!'



HANS ARNE NAKREM / UNIVERISTY OF OSLO

Petroleum industry students sniff a rock formation in Billefjorden, the composition of which is similar to formations the industry hopes to tap in the Barents Sea. The students' verdict: "The source is strong in this one," according to Snorre Olausen, an Arctic petroleum geology professor at The University Centre in Svalbard. UNIS and the University of Oslo, in a project funded by ConocoPhillips and Lundin, are mapping oil-smelling and/or oil-colored rocks in the archipelago. An English translation of Olausen's update about the project can be read at <http://tinyurl.com/o8k8bzj>.

## Icesheet

### Random bits of the week's weirdness:

There's one less politician in the world for now and most people seem to agree that's a good thing, even if his entry into big-time politics made him a national celebrity only a couple of years ago. **Viljar Hanssen, 20, who became Longyearbyen's most famous youth after surviving near fatal gunshot injuries at Utøya and becoming the youngest-ever member of the city council a few months later, is dropping out of the AUF youth political organization he joined about eight years ago.** "There are some pretty harsh aspects of political life which I have little sense of," he told *Nordlys* this week. "When positions and fighting for positions are more important than people, then I react... That is a tough and rugged aspect of politics that I'm sick and tired of. For it is not only in 'House of Cards' that stuff happens." He also dissed the excessive number of career politicians "especially in the major parties, Conservative and Labor," which ought to make for lively family dinner discussions since his mom, Christan Kristoffersen, is the top local Labor official and seen by some as potentially Svalbard's first member of Parliament. But while his mom's Facebook page is full of comments like "what a wise young man" and "respect and happiness to the max with your studies Viljar," he also told the newspaper "I think the best politicians are those who experience a different life than just politics." Which suggests, of course, he'll be stumping for votes and donations again at some point after finishing his college studies in psychology, leadership and marketing in Tromsø ... There's an early contender for the Most-Mocked Tourist of the Year Award after **the governor's office got a phone call Sunday night from a tourist whose car was stuck in the snow at Sverdrupbyen. "This person was**

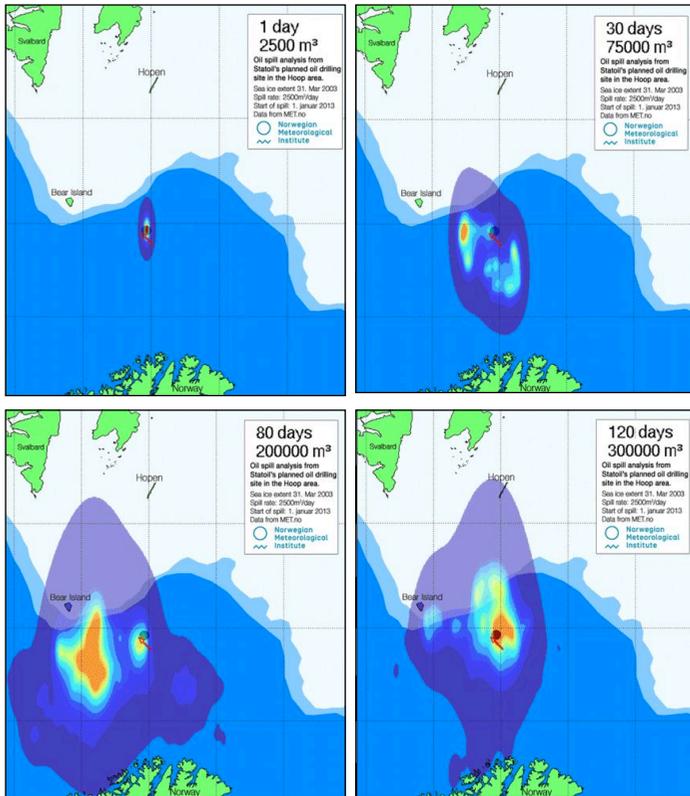


TROMS AUF

**He would have let the dog suffer:** Fortunately, the decision by Viljar Hanssen, left, to exit politics also means our editor won't have to try to sleep with him to get a scoop.

**afraid of bears and therefore dared not go out of the car,"** according to The Local Paper of Ridicule. Police went out with a rope and winch to "get the tourists up and safely to more navigable roads." As with Viljar, there's been reaction on Facebook and let's just say the word "respect" isn't showing up so far ... Finally, speaking of respect lost and found, **two local entities are finally offering space to display the severed head of disgraced former Store Norske leader Robert Hermansen** (OK, it's just the bronze bust of him, but the former is more fun to write). Svalbard Museum and Karlsberger Pub both say they'd be happy showcasing Mr. Bust since he's a significant part of local history who achieved great things before getting involved in a corruption scandal. But city leaders, who for months have said they want the sculpture out of city hall ASAP, aren't exactly jumping on the offers, saying they'll need to go through the whole process of reports, committee meetings, etc. first.

A series of charts depicts the anticipated path of an oil spill from one of the northernmost areas in the Barents Sea the Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum and Energy plans to offer for drilling. The study commissioned by Greenpeace and conducted by the Norwegian Meteorological Institute concludes that a spill from one of the northernmost Norwegian blocks could hit the ice edge in 14 days and approach Bjørnøya within about 30 days. The spill's progress would slow significantly afterward, taking more than a month to reach the island itself, but then could potentially linger in the area for a lengthy period of time. Greenpeace officials said cleanup efforts would be "almost impossible."



NORWEGIAN METEOROLOGICAL INSTITUTE

# Bjørnøya faces oil spill risk

## DRILLING, from page 1

of making new, major discoveries is the biggest," a press release by the ministry states.

Drilling in the new areas is being strongly protested by environmental groups. Greenpeace, which has staged numerous high-profile demonstrations and campaigns in an effort to impose a moratorium on Arctic drilling, warns an oil spill in the area could have devastating consequences for the vulnerable Arctic environment.

"By opening for oil drilling this close to the ice edge, the Norwegian oil minister is pushing the limits," Erlend Tellnes, Greenpeace's Arctic adviser, told the *Barents Observer*. "A spill would be almost impossible to clean up and could have dramatic consequences for wildlife."

Norway currently forbids drilling in icy waters due to the lack of ability to adequately cleaning up an oil spill.

A spill from Norwegian Statoil's northernmost drill site in the Barents Sea could reach the ice edge in 14 days and Bjørnøya in 80 days, according to an analysis conducted by the Norwegian Meteorological Institute for

Greenpeace.

The island is a protected nature reserve known for its large seabird nesting areas, as well as a large population of polar bears and Arctic foxes.

Greenpeace also states the high north drilling will be a breach with the government's parliament agreement with two support parties. That agreement states that oil drilling should not take place in areas close to the ice edge.

Oil companies are increasingly eyeing the north for production due to shrinking ice sheet as climate change takes effect. Estimates from various governments state that one-fourth of the world's untapped oil may be in the Arctic, and Austrian oil company OMV found oil close to Hoop earlier this fall.

But drilling plans even in approved have often been delayed by logistical problems. Last year Statoil postponed its planned northernmost drilling because the platform wasn't fit for Arctic conditions. Shell also abandoned plans for drilling in the Alaskan Arctic for similar reasons.

**There's more! Visit [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net) for the complete story.**

## HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

### Store Norske spending 115M to boost Mine 7 production

Store Norske is planning to invest 115 million kroner in new equipment for Mine 7 in the hope of increasing coal production by 31.5 percent, according to company managers. The purchase, one of the biggest restructurings in the company's history, seeks to replace aging and often malfunctioning machinery with equipment that's more efficient and cheaper to operate. The company hopes to increase last year's production of 70,000 tons to 92,000 tons by 2015. "The volume increase is due primarily to higher uptime of machinery and equipment," said Ronny-André Olsen, the mine's manager. In addition, he said larger cargo wagons will be able to carry more coal.

### Avinor seeking 1.8M from city for excessive hookup fees

Avinor is demanding a 1.8-million-kroner reimbursement from the city of Longyearbyen for what the company calls excessive fees for providing heating and water connections to a new hanger at Svalbard Airport. Morten Ulsnes, the airport's manager, said he believes Avinor's case is similar to that of Bykaia Self Storage, which successfully challenged road connection fees that Norway's Ministry of Local Government and Modernization found exceeded the city's actual cost. City Manager Lars Ole Saugnes said he has not yet seen the complaint, but noted water and heating connection fees are calculated differently than road fees.

### Group wants apology from mayor for May Day mix-up

A Svalbard trade union group is demanding an apology from Longyearbyen Mayor Christin Kristoffersen for what it claims is an improper attempt to change the keynote speaker for this year's May Day celebration. Yngve Hågensen accepted an invitation 18 months ago from LO Svalbard to be the speaker, but Kristoffersen wrote in a Facebook message last week she wanted former Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg. Hågensen said he was OK with the switch if local organizers wanted it, but LO Svalbard leader Ottar Svensen said the group is authorized to pick the speaker and it was never contacted by Kristoffersen.

## Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy. SE winds to 22 km/h. High -5C (-10C wind chill), low -8C (-12C wind chill).	Snow. S winds to 35 km/h. High -1C (-7C wind chill), low -5C (-11C wind chill).	Cloudy. SW winds to 42 km/h. High 0C (-5C wind chill), low -1C (-7C wind chill).	Cloudy. SW winds to 29 km/h. High -1C (-6C wind chill), low -7C (-11C wind chill).
Sunrise 10:17a; sunset 2:07p	Sunrise 10:03a; sunset 2:21p	Sunrise 9:50a; sunset 2:34p	Sunrise 9:38a; sunset 2:46p
<b>Extended forecast:</b> Sunday, cloudy, -4C (-9C), -9C (-14C), light 5:30h; Monday, cloudy, -2C (-8C), -4C (-10C), light 5:51h; Tuesday, cloudy, -2C (-6C), -3C (-9C), light 6:12h; Wednesday, cloudy, -1C (-4C), -7C (-11C), light 6:32h			

Data provided by storm.no



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Conductor Jan Helge Trøen, left, and Anne Lise Sandvik exchange banter during a break in rehearsals for "Messiah" at Huset this week. Sandvik, who has spent a year and a half preparing for the performance, said the oratorio's complexity has inspired singers to work harder to master it.

## 'Messiah' already on high

### HANDEL, from page 1

she's seen noticeable and constant improvement during the long months of rehearsals because of that high level of challenge.

"When something seems easy people don't pay attention as much," she said.

An open call for local performers for the iconic three-part choral – which narrates the prophecies, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – was enough to lure Øivind Lundh, 66, who said he last sang on stage when he was 16.

"I think the choir has already benefitted from doing this," he said. "There's the fellowship and I'm not sure you can listen to this and not be influenced."

While the local performers have had only

a few opportunities to rehearse with the singers from the mainland, "I'm surprised how good it works," said Mildrid Elvik Svoen, 25. She said she sang in previous local choir performances featuring a variety of songs, but "Messiah" is an entirely new level of challenge.

"It's a lot of tones that go very fast," she said.

Kristin Heggland, 26, said she's signing for the first time, but "I played instruments before, so I can read notes. If I couldn't I don't think I could do it."

Tickets, available at press time, can be purchased online at [tinyurl.com/opaq4d6](http://tinyurl.com/opaq4d6).

**There's more! Visit [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net) for the complete story.**

## Big changes in alcohol policy likely

### BREW, from page 1

A proposal ending the ban could take effect by fall as it appears to have no significant opposition from government agencies, according to *Nordlys*. Norwegian Minister of Agriculture and Food Sylvi Listhaug, who submitted the proposal, said there are no logical reasons to continue the ban.

"That it is now been forbidden to produce alcohol in Svalbard is completely incomprehensible to me," she said. "Around the country there have popped up local breweries, each with distinctive features. It has become a culture, as well as providing local jobs."

Johansen told the newspaper he hopes his company, Svalbard Bryggeri, will brew about 100,000 liters of beer annually, which would be about one-fourth of Svalbard's market share.

The Russian state-owned company Trust

Arktikugol has also applied for a license to manufacture alcohol in the hope of opening a microbrewery in Barentsburg.

Overturning the ban on alcohol production also means the government is likely to pursue a long-planned review of Svalbard's alcohol rationing laws. Cecilie Brein-Karlsen, undersecretary for the Minister of Health and Care Services, stated in an e-mail to *Svalbardposten* the review will be a natural followup to a new policy allowing individuals to make and possess alcohol in quantities far surpassing the limits on sales.

Current monthly limits include two bottles of spirits or four bottles of fortified wine, and 24 cans or half bottles of beer with a maximum alcohol content of 4.75 percent.

**There's more! Visit [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net) for the complete story.**

## What's up

### Feb. 19

5 p.m.: Movie: "The LEGO Movie," U.S. animated film dubbed in Norwegian, all ages. Kulturhuset.

### Feb. 20

6 p.m.: "Out and Running" youth snowmobile safety/navigation course. Meet at governor's office at Skjæringa. Continues on March 30.

### Feb. 22

1:30-5:30 p.m.: Broadcast of Olympics on large-screen TV. Longyearbyen Youth Club.

2 p.m.: Movie: "The LEGO Movie," U.S. animated film dubbed in Norwegian, all ages. Kulturhuset.

6:30 p.m.: "Messiah," performed by the Longyearbyen Mixed Choir and Den Norske Opera & Ballett. Huset.

### Feb. 23

11 a.m.: 5K dogsledding race in Bolterdalen. Registration and information at [www.longyearbyenhundeklubb.no](http://www.longyearbyenhundeklubb.no).

5 p.m.: Movie: "Kraftidioten," Norwegian comedy, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "Nymphomaniac," Danish drama/erotic, ages 18 and up. Kulturhuset.

### Feb. 24

8 p.m.: Trivia quiz. Barentz Pub.

### Feb. 25

1 p.m.: Administration Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

7 p.m.: Evening Mass and fireplace social. Svalbard Church.

### Feb. 26

6 p.m.: Movie: "Død Snø 2," Norwegian comedy, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

### March 2-8

Solfestuka 2014, celebrating the return of sunlight to Longyearbyen. Full schedule and details at [www.solfest.no](http://www.solfest.no).

### March 2

11 a.m. Mass. Svalbard Church.

## What's online

**Icepeople.net** provides daily updates of news about Svalbard and the world's polar regions, plus extras for articles from the print edition. Among the latest news:

- Arctic thaw wreaking havoc w/ jet stream
- Will climate change result in more crime?
- Reindeer glitter ups Finland's road safety
- Tinder makes its first match in Antarctica

Balloting is underway! Suggest categories and pick your winners for

## The Best of Svalbard 2014

[www.icepeople.net/bestofsvabard](http://www.icepeople.net/bestofsvabard)

(By the way, we'll be selling ads for this one so the winners can gloat and the losers can explain why we have our heads completely up our asses.)