

Nature Protection at Lake Neusiedl

(Naturschutz im Raum Neusiedler See)

Name of Supreme Audit Institution

Österreichischer Rechnungshof (Austrian Court of Audit)

Title of summary report on audit findings

Report; Tätigkeitsbericht des Rechnungshofes Reihe Bund 2003/5; published in December 2003

Audit issues

Ecosystems: biodiversity - ecological infrastructure - ecosystem management
Nature & recreation: conservation & improvement of natural and/or cultural heritage - management of national parks & forests - recreation & tourism

Audit type

Combined audit

Description of the Audit

The aim of the audit was to investigate and evaluate the measures of the responsible administrative bodies in field of nature protection in the region of Lake Neusiedl/Fertö.

The audit was undertaken by the Austrian Court of Audit on its own initiative. It was conducted in September and October 2002 and covered the period between 1997 and 2002. A co-ordinated audit with the Hungarian State Audit Office was conducted in spring 2003, a joint report was released at the end of 2003. This joint report is a summary of the cross-border problems and measures.

The audits were regularity audits as well as performance audits, aiming at the efficiency and effectiveness of public funds spent on ecological and economic matters of programmes and measures already implemented and planned.

Scope of audit

Target of the audit was to reveal conflicts in the use of the region, to elaborate possibilities to solve them and to evaluate bilateral co-operation.

Audited units

- Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management
- State (Land) of Burgenland
- National Park Neusiedler See–Seewinkel

Summary of the audit findings and evaluation of the audited activities

The region of Lake Neusiedl/Fertö, located at the border between Austria and Hungary, is unique in the world and one of the most remarkable ornithological sites in Europe. It is protected by several categories of nature protection zones and received a lot of international awards.

The number as well as the area of the characteristic shallow lakes without any water contributor or drain (so called "Lacken") has decreased dramatically. The economic utilisation of the Lacken resulted in the disruption of the natural water management and as a consequence in losses of typical plants and in the devastation of the Lacken due to the overwhelming penetration of reed.

The actual state of the fishstocks was unsatisfactory due to the distorted balance of species.

From 1997 to 2002 annual expenses of 2.47 Mill EUR were spent on the safeguarding of areas in the region of Lake Neusiedl/Fertö. Many cross-border projects were implemented and financed by programmes of the EU. There were conflicts of use with agriculture, hunting, fishery and tourism. Hunting of waterfowl in a Ramsar protection area should be scrutinised. Any economic utilisation of the Lacken has to be avoided.

The river Wulka, the main water contributor of the lake in Austria, only reached biological water quality II to III. The problem of illegal wells was solved with an inquiry of wells in the region and a regulation system for the extraction of water.

The co-operation between Austria and Hungary concerning the region of Lake Neusiedl/Fertö was successful.

Addressees of the summary report on audit findings

The report was forwarded to the Nationalrat (federal legislation) of Austria and the Landtag of Burgenland (legislative bodies of the State).

Results of the audit

The beginning of the restitution of Lacken in the National Park was reported, which leads to a retreat of reed. Except for singular events there are no more disturbances of the natural water management of the Lacken.

After a change in the structure of the fishery concerning the lake there will be a change in the fishstock, too.

Measures concerning the waste water treatment facilities in the river Wulka catchment area were implemented. The adjustment to the state of the art of these facilities will be prioritised.

In the whole “natural zone” of the National Park hunting was ceased.

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