

Implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Austria

(Österreichweite Umsetzung der Ramsar Konvention)

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

Audit type

Combined audit

Description of the Audit

The aim of the audit was to investigate if the commitments of the convention are met. The economic and efficient use of invested funds, the efficiency of the legal framework and the ecological output were evaluated.

The audit was undertaken by the Austrian Court of Audit on its own initiative. It was conducted between September and November 2002.

Scope of audit

development of the legal framework

objectives and their achievement

priorities

financing

upcoming costs in comparison with estimated revenues

Audited units

- Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management

- States (Länder) of Burgenland, Niederösterreich (Lower Austria), Kärnten (Carinthia), Oberösterreich (Upper Austria), Salzburg, Steiermark (Styria), Vorarlberg and Wien (Vienna)

Summary of the audit findings and evaluation of the audited activities

In Austria there are 11 Ramsar sites covering a total surface of 1.180 km².

The protection of wetlands and waterfowl is linked to many other national and international regulations and conventions.

An amendment to the Austrian constitution is needed in order to implement national standards for implementing international conventions concerning nature protection. (Now the States have competence under the law for nature protection).

Not all Ramsar sites were protected areas, they should be at least nature protection zones.

The borders of many sites were not exactly defined.

There was no comprehensive database about research concerning wetlands.

The surveying and mapping of habitats was not finished yet.

In the opinion of the Austrian Court of Audit it is better to protect habitats using the legal framework than by contracting. If contracting is done, it would be better to buy the areas than to lease them.

In some States there was no legal protection for wetlands.

There were conflicts of use with agriculture, hunting, fishery and tourism, these were different from State to State.

Addressees of the summary report on audit findings

The report was forwarded to the Nationalrat (federal legislation) of Austria and the Landtage (legislative bodies of the States) of the audited States.

Results of the audit

Six new Ramsar sites were projected, one of them already notified to the Ramsar bureau.

New nature protection zones were implemented.

Many legal and ecological measures were taken in order to improve the condition of Austrian wetlands.

Projects partly funded by the EU were initiated.

Concepts for "wise use" were implemented in many sites.

Restrictions on fishery and hunting were put into effect.

contact:

www.rechnungshof.gv.at

wg.environment@rechnungshof.gv.at

lang@rechnungshof.gv.at