

Survey of the sustainable use of reindeer grazing resources in Finnmark County in Norway

The current grazing resource situation in some parts of Finnmark County is not in accordance with the goal of an ecologically sustainable reindeer husbandry. Satellite pictures and vegetation mapping show that the lichen cover in Western Finnmark and the Karasjok area has decreased considerably over the last 30 years. This may be due to too many reindeer and/or a misuse of the seasonal grazing land. At the same time, the reindeer grazing areas have come under pressure from development and motorised traffic.

Document no. 3:12 (2003-2004) The Office of the Auditor General's survey of the sustainable use of reindeer grazing resources in Finnmark County was submitted to the Norwegian Storting on 13 September 2004. The aim of the study was to assess the resource situation and whether the Ministry of Agriculture has made use of policy instruments to achieve sustainable reindeer husbandry. The study shows that the grazing resource situation must be stabilised and improved in order to ensure sustainable development. In order to reverse the negative trend, the number of reindeer must be reduced. In recent years, the number of reindeer, number of new calves and slaughter weights have increased. This increased number of reindeer may result in a further reduction in lichen cover.

The study shows that there has been insufficient agreement on the basic constraints for reindeer husbandry as required in the Reindeer Herding Act. Economic policy instruments from the Reindeer Husbandry Agreement have mainly been utilised to regulate the number of reindeer, but this has not led to the desired reduction in the reindeer population. Basic constraints that are adapted to the ecological situation and that give predictability for the reindeer herders are important in order to utilise the grazing resources in an ecologically sustainable manner. The Ministry of Agriculture agrees that the grazing situation is serious, and that the ecological sustainability is the necessary basis for achieving a sustainable and vital reindeer husbandry in the long run. The Ministry notes that a number of measures have been initiated to ensure that the goal of sustainable reindeer husbandry is achieved.

The study also shows that a significant number of area encroachments are at the expense of the reindeer grazing area in Finnmark. The scope and effect of the actual reallocation of land in the reindeer grazing areas has been poorly documented and assessed by the municipalities and the Norwegian Reindeer Husbandry Administration. In over half of the individual cases, the municipalities did not take the opinions of the district boards for reindeer husbandry into consideration. There were some cases that primarily dealt with dispensations from approved plans. In connection with the Office of the Auditor General's study, the Ministry of the Environment will evaluate whether they should provide further guidance to the municipalities concerning the use of dispensations in matters that affect reindeer husbandry.

The scope of motorised transport in Finnmark has increased during all seasons in recent years. Therefore, the Office of the Auditor General raised questions as to whether the application of the Act relating to motorised transport in marginal land and watercourses gives sufficient consideration to reindeer husbandry. The Ministry of the Environment will await the results of the pilot scheme with the municipal area plans for motorised transport in marginal land before new measures are initiated.