



Summary

Examination of the normative implementation of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, especially as a habitat for water birds and wading birds of international importance, and its implementation in the region around Lake Constance.

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) has carried out the first environmental audit in which it examined, for one thing, the normative implementation of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, especially as a habitat for water birds and wading birds of international importance, and assessed, for another, the situation of the nature reserves in the Lake Constance region with respect to the implementation and progress achieved in terms of the goals of the Ramsar Convention and the national enforcement law pertaining to this. The area around Lake Constance lent itself in particular to closer examination because the Ermatinger Becken Nature Reserve, a wetland of «international importance», borders on Baden Württemberg's Ramsar-listed Wollmatinger Ried, and the Alter Rhein Nature Reserve, a wetland of «national importance», adjoins Vorarlberg's Rheindelta Nature Reserve which is designated as a Ramsar site. The SFAO is aware that in limiting itself to this one segment of Lake Constance, no comprehensive assessment of the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Switzerland can possibly have been performed. It is also particularly worthy to note that the Ordinances on Biotopes of National Importance, which have been enacted on the basis of Art. 18a of the Act on the Protection of Nature and Cultural Heritage, have created a sound basis for the

development of Ramsar nature reserve sites in the domain of mires and Alpine alluvial zones.

The codification of the Ramsar goals in diverse environmental decrees as initiated by the Swiss Agency for the Environment, Forests and Landscape (SAEFL) as a result of the ratification of the Ramsar Convention in 1976, can be defined as positive. It is to be further conducted in terms of harmonization with a view towards biodiversity and the protection of species. The formulation of a national wetland strategy would be advisable. Potential for improvement has been shown concerning internal administrative coordination such as in the area of international projects supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, while the supervision of the Ramsar dossier is entrusted to various SAEFL divisions. The examination of bundling together species protection under the control of one unit is advisable. Understaffing has been largely invoked as justification for the reticence shown by the SAEFL to date concerning international cooperation within the scope of Ramsar. The SFAO has pointed out that the SAEFL should inform the competent state administration bodies if international obligations cannot be met due to a lack of human resources.

In the implementation process linked to nature reserves in the canton of Thurgau, the SAEFL found itself and still finds itself confronted with considerable difficulties. Against the backdrop of tradition-honoured collective bird-hunting expeditions in the Konstanzer Trichter und Ermatinger Becken – abolished only in 1985 – there was consistent opposition at the municipal and cantonal levels against the designation of Ermatinger Becken as a



Ramsar Nature Reserve. Only after granting concessions concerning a hunting zone in Ermatingen did the SAEFL designate in 1991 the Ermatinger Becken Nature Reserve as being «of international importance». Its outstanding prominence as a resting place for water birds and wading birds from Nordic countries in the autumn and winter months has been documented by ornithological experts.

The implementation of the regulations of the Ordinance of 21 January 1991 on Reserves for Water Birds and Migratory Birds of International and National Importance has to date proved to be inadequate in the above-mentioned Nature Reserve. As an illustration, the canton of Thurgau has namely abstained from enforcing the requirements concerning signposts. In contrast to Wollmatinger Ried, the Swiss nature reserve is absolutely not recognisable as such (with the exception of one signpost in Gottlieben). Furthermore, the canton has yet to submit an order for the required nature reserve supervision subsidised by the Confederation (repeated refusals of the corresponding requests for personnel in the cantonal parliament).

Recommendations have been made to the SAEFL to promote acceptance of the nature reserve by means of increased public relations, and to vigorously work towards eliminating the delays in implementation at the level of the authorities. A new point of departure should emerge with the services agreement within the scope of the new organisation of financial equalisation and tasks between the Confederation and the cantons. Cooperation with Baden-Württemberg is to be activated in the light of the Ramsar goal of creating

cross-border nature reserves wherever ecological unities exist. The support of the Ramsar Secretariat in Gland in the canton of Vaud could be requested in this regard. In view of the substantial bird population migration from the Ermatinger Becken in September 2003, a detailed evaluation has been recommended as to restrictions on water sports.

In the implementation of federal regulations in the Lake Constance nature reserves of the canton of St. Gallen (SG) no implementation shortcomings were encountered. Meanwhile, at the level of the SAEFL and the canton of St. Gallen, it is recommended to intensify the contacts established, during the SFAO's audit, with the competent authorities of Vorarlberg in order to create synergies for the development of the Alter Rhein and Rhinedelta Nature Reserves in Austria, and to follow up on the possibilities of a cross-border Ramsar zone.

SAEFL is also encouraged to include the Border Guard in training sessions for nature reserve wardens so that they may be able (as is provided for in the Ordinance of 21st January 1991 on Reserves for Water Birds and Migratory Birds of International and National Importance) to carry out game-warden tasks in boundary waters.

The SFAO's report met with a positive reaction from the SAEFL's directors who expressed their readiness to implement the recommendations. The details of the SAEFL's comments have been integrated into the corresponding sections of the report.

The Joint Committee on Finance of the Federal Assembly has taken note favourably of the report and its recommendations.