

Environmental audits 2001/2002- The audit of water and waste water management (Austria)

Theme: Protection of Water

Author: Dr. Heinrich Lang Rechnungshof (Austrian Court of Audit)

What were the main reasons for choosing this topic?

- a) We wanted to detect the environmental effects by looking at water quality. At the time of the audit more than 81 % of surface waters were classified biological water quality stage 2 or better.
- b) The financial dimension is remarkable for Austria.
- c) We wanted to do a comprehensive report on the whole system. Only the Court of Audit is able and competent to audit all levels concerned and to give a complete summary of the system of constructing and financing.

What was the scope of the audit?

- a) Organisation and financing of the system, because the money which is granted now has to be raised and paid in the upcoming twenty years as the construction of the projects goes on. Financing was secured only till 2004.
- b) Achieving the legal goals of a 85% connection rate (increasing from 71% 1993 to 81% 2000), increasing water quality and low charges (0,5-1 EURO for water supply and 1,5-2 EURO for waste water per cubic meter)
- c) Effects on employment and infrastructure

The creation of employment was 20 employees per 1 million EURO.

What was the dimension of the audit?

We covered more than 50% of Austria itself, of the projects, the investments and the grants. The projects were divided into groups depending on the amount of investment and provinces. The largest projects were audited without exception, from the others a representative number, chosen by random, to be able to give a statistically valid statement.

Resources and dimension

Three departments were involved in this audit, four teams were on the road.

As one consequence of this audit, environmental matters of all possible levels and organisations were clustered in one single department by September 2001 (department for comprehensive environmental protection).

Main Results

Negotiations for reconstructing the financing system were initiated. The handling was partly streamlined and restructured. The law concerning environmental grants in Austria was reviewed, new standards concerning the system were set up.