



SWEDISH NATIONAL
AUDIT OFFICE

Summary

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Central government efforts to combat invasive alien species

Summary

Invasive alien species is one of the greatest threats to biodiversity and can cause considerable damage to nature and to important activities in society. The Swedish National Audit Office (Swedish NAO) has audited whether central government efforts to combat invasive alien species are effective. The audit covered the Government's governance and follow-up, as well as actions by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management and county administrative boards on invasive alien species.

The overall conclusion is that central government efforts to combat invasive alien species are not effective. Central government efforts have been intensified in recent years, although essential elements are still missing for actions to function effectively. The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management have not implemented all the measures required to ensure that the combined work is effective. This greatly affects county administrative boards' opportunities to carry out the most urgent actions on invasive alien species. Nor has the Government, through its governance and follow-up, ensured that the actions have been carried out efficiently.

Audit findings

The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management have not implemented all the measures required for effective action

The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management have not implemented all the measures required for actions on invasive alien species to function effectively. The government agencies have developed a monitoring system that can quickly identify new invasive alien species, but information about the spread and about measures implemented to combat invasive alien species remain limited. Furthermore, for three out of four EU listed species that have been identified as being widely spread, the government agencies have not laid down management measures to stipulate how these species are to be dealt with. Nor have the agencies given priority to drafting a proposal for a national list of invasive alien species of concern in Sweden – beyond EU listed species – that are causing problems and therefore need to be addressed. All in all, this has led to uncertainty among county administrative boards, property owners and other actors concerned about which species should be managed with priority and how management is to be implemented.

The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management have given priority to informing the general public, while concrete guidance to certain relevant actors, such as property owners and excavation companies, has been more limited. The government agencies' information campaigns have reached many people and have increased public knowledge of invasive alien species. On the other hand, general public knowledge on how the species should be managed does not yet seem to have increased to the same extent.

The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management have offered some guidance and support, but guidance has been limited on subjects such as methods for management and how waste containing invasive alien species is to be dealt with. The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management have also given limited support to county administrative boards in terms of management measures on private land, which can lead to urgent measures on private land being delayed.

County administrative boards are not in a position to effectively combat invasive alien species

The county administrative boards' prospects of combating invasive alien species effectively is impacted by the fact that the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management have not produced any documentation that sets out which species and management measures the county administrative boards should give priority to. This is liable to delay management measures and to risk that the measures implemented are not the most urgent ones. It is also the responsibility of county administrative boards to supervise that other actors carry out management measures. Supervision takes a long time and therefore it can be difficult for county administrative boards to use supervision to compel property owners to take management measures quickly against invasive alien species.

Deficiencies in the Government's management and follow-up have delayed effective efforts to combat invasive alien species

The Government has not ensured that the government agencies' responsibility and duties are sufficiently clear in the legislation. The Government was slow to point out a clear division of responsibility and it remains unclear what responsibility government agencies and municipalities have for identifying and reporting the occurrence and spread of invasive alien species. This lack of clarity also applies to reporting implemented management measures. There is also some uncertainty concerning which agency is responsible for investigation and decisions in individual cases on how species that are widely spread are to be managed, which has delayed the establishment of management measures for land-based species.

The Government's follow-up of the relevant agencies' work has been insufficient. The Government has not followed up on the consequences of the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management prioritisation of efforts for the combined work on invasive alien species. This includes the consequences of the fact that the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management have not yet proposed which species are to be given priority, nor have they confirmed how management is to be carried out.

Recommendations

To the Government

- Clarify which government agency is to investigate and take decisions on management measures for EU listed species with a confirmed large spread in Sweden.
- Clarify what responsibility government agencies and municipalities have for identifying and reporting occurrences and spread of invasive alien species and for reporting implemented measures.
- Develop follow-up of government agencies' actions on invasive alien species to be able to assess whether the combined work has led to the desired results.

To the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management

- Continue to develop the monitoring system on invasive alien species to improve information on the spread and the implemented management measures.
- Finish drafting a proposal for a national list of invasive alien species.
- Develop the guiding support to county administrative boards on the implementation of management measures on private land.
- Continue to develop targeted information and guidance to more target groups than at present.