

Management Audit of the Federal Office for the Environment

Summary of the Report by the Parliamentary Control of the Administration for the National Council Control Committee

28 January 2010

Summary

This management audit provides a summary assessment of the political and operational management of the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN). The audit was carried out by the Parliamentary Control of the Administration at the request of the National Council Control Committee.

The audit focussed on the question of whether the set of instruments in place at the FOEN for the purposes of political and operational steering is adequate for ensuring that the Office can fulfil its mandate. In order to answer this question the internal steering cycle was reconstructed and assessed using a standardised model. In addition, the interaction with higher level steering was also examined with the Federal Council and the Department being considered together. Data was gathered between June and October 2009 and took the form of interviews, on-site visits, standardised and telephone questionnaires and document analyses.

Overall, the FOEN's internal steering system is functional. Senior management consciously sets priorities and monitors their implementation. The set of steering instruments in place is exemplary in that tasks and resources are combined, thus ensuring integrated steering. At present steering takes largely place at the level of activities. Impact-oriented steering is not yet possible as aims are not clearly defined. There is room for improvement in various respects, not least with regard to technical implementation. The steering instruments are still not sufficiently well established among lower levels of management. Cost effectiveness could be improved through further streamlining and a broader use of information.

The majority of the FOEN's partners and target groups are satisfied with the Office's services. Its staff are competent and obliging. The FOEN takes care to systematically nurture its contacts. Its relations with other federal authorities and cantonal and intercantonal bodies have improved in recent years. The opinions of interest groups as to their relations with the FOEN vary. According to various people outside the Office and inside it, the FOEN tries to mobilise political support for its aims through the inclusion of specific external partners.

Compared across the federal administration, job satisfaction among the staff of the FOEN is above average and they show a high level of idealistic commitment to environmental issues. However, they have yet to fully endorse senior management's strategy which involves a shift away from a unique focus on environmental protection towards one of resource management which also takes account of economic and social aspects. Moreover, conflicting goals in the legal bases governing the Office's work make it difficult to define a common strategy.

The formalised steering instruments of the Federal Council and the Federal Department are limited. Few requirements are set out and systematic checks are

rare. Steering tends to be reactive, but responsibility for supervision is clearly defined within the General Secretariat, which should ensure a certain level of control.

The full report is available in German and French and the Italian version should be ready around June 2010: <http://www.parlament.ch>> Kommissionen> Parlamentarische Verwaltungskontrolle.