

Audit of revenue from species conservation

Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office

KEY POINTS

Switzerland is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The aim of the Convention is to ensure that international trade in around 40,000 endangered animal and plant species does not jeopardise the conservation of biodiversity. CITES stipulates that each country must have a competent management body and scientific authority to carry out checks to ensure that trade is legal.

In Switzerland, these responsibilities fall to the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO), with the support of the Federal Office for Customs and Border Security (FOCBS). Each year, the FSVO issues around 100,000 import and export permits for specimens, and performs just under 20,000 import checks. For these services, the FSVO receives around CHF 4 million in fees each year, and employs some 15 FTEs.

For the first time, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the effectiveness and efficiency of the control system in place. It also checked whether the fees charged for implementing the Convention were appropriate. The results of the audit were positive. However, the SFAO believes that the control system needs to be improved and that the fees charged should be increased.

The control system needs clarification

Generally speaking, the FSVO focuses its checks on risks. Its control system is made up of many stages and involves several players. Despite this complexity, the FSVO does not have a formalised control concept. In the SFAO's view, formalising the concept would make it possible to review and clarify cooperation with the FOCBS on risk assessment and data exchange, with the aim of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of checks.

The FSVO entrusts a large part of its administrative tasks to professional traders, who are required to declare movements of goods and keep accounts. The FSVO can check goods in stock at any time by carrying out on-the-spot inspections, in the same way as an audit. This possibility is not used in a sufficiently targeted manner, even though it is crucial to ensuring that the system functions properly. The SFAO believes that the FSVO should increase its inspections.

The fees charged need to be increased

The Confederation is not allowed to make a profit from the services it provides in connection with species conservation. At the same time, the SFAO believes that the trade in protected species should not be subsidised: the aim should be to cover costs as far as possible.

The analysis carried out by the FSVO shows a cost coverage close to 100%. However, certain costs, in particular the time spent by Customs on border controls, were not taken into account in the analysis. The SFAO recommends that the FSVO complete its analysis and, if necessary, increase its tariffs.

The FSVO is undertaking digitalisation projects that will have an impact on certain stages of the control process. The SFAO expects profitability targets for these projects to be systematically defined.

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