

Abstract

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Performance reporting by the Finnish Game and Fisheries Research Institute

The subject of this audit was performance reporting by the Finnish Game and Fisheries Research Institute. The Finnish Game and Fisheries Research Institute is a government agency which operates under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The purpose of the audit was to determine whether performance reporting by the Finnish Game and Fisheries Research Institute provides a correct and adequate picture of its activities and effectiveness. The audit evaluated the setting of performance objectives, its nature and scope, as well as the reliability and adequacy of performance reporting. The audit also investigated how the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has reported on the Finnish Game and Fisheries Research Institute's activities in its annual report, for example.

The performance objectives set by the ministry for the Finnish Game and Fisheries Research Institute were quite concrete and quite numerous. They did not cover all the institution's activities, however. Objectives were by nature mainly descriptions of activities and their development. Productivity, economy or effectiveness objectives were not set for the institution as a whole or its result units. The tentative performance objectives presented in the budget were more general than actual performance objectives and were also considerably less numerous. In terms of content they were not always in line with the final performance objectives set by the ministry.

Cost information on individual objectives, priorities or research projects was not presented in any plan or objective document. Consequently it is impossible to form an idea of the connection between objectives and funds appropriated to achieve them. This naturally has its own implications for reporting.

In practice all the performance objectives set by the ministry were achieved and their achievement was also reported to the ministry. According to documents, all the objectives which the institution set for itself in its operational plan were not achieved as well as the objectives set by the ministry, however. The achievement of tentative performance objectives presented in the budget was not reported separately.

Publications issued by the Finnish Game and Fisheries Research Institute's result units contained concrete information on the results of individual research projects as well as their effectiveness and costs. These publications also contained information on research projects which were not mentioned specifically in operational plans.

The audit indicated that reporting can for the most part be considered comprehensive and in line with objectives. The main problem is that it is not easy to form an idea of the effectiveness of activities on the basis of the annual reports prepared by the institution and the ministry. Reporting is - largely as a result of the nature of the Finnish Game and Fisheries Research Institute - mostly limited to describing activities and objectives. The broad targeting of costs and the inadequate linking of costs to performance weaken the picture which can be obtained of different operational priorities and changes in them.

The audit also studied joint indicators developed by various organizations to measure the sustainable use of natural resources. Not much experience has been gained so far in the use of these indicators, but the audit indicated that these can provide a better general idea of effectiveness in the area of game, fish and reindeer management than performance reporting by the Finnish Game and Fisheries Research Institute.

The criticism and development recommendations of an international evaluation team supported the audit's observation that annual performance objectives and reporting are not sufficient to direct and evaluate the activities of an organization like the Finnish Game and Fisheries Research Institute. Activities must also be planned and evaluated over a longer term.

A study conducted for the Ministry of Finance concerning ministries' approach to performance management also supported observations made in the audit. For example, evaluating the level of effectiveness requires more external as well as internal information.

Once again, many of the problems noted in the audit can be regarded as resulting from the inadequate definition of performance management and its light legislative base in relation to other management practices. Result management has been added alongside legal regulation, operational and financial planning and budgeting, and it has not yet been coordinated very well with traditional control and management practices.