



Extract from the report to the
Public Accounts Committee on
Denmark's River Basin Management
Plans

March
2014

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I. Introduction and conclusion

1. This report is about the Ministry of the Environment's planning and preparation of the Danish river basin management plans (RBMPs). Together the RBMPs constitute one overall plan for improving the Danish water environment and thereby improve the quality of coastal waters, lakes, watercourses, fjords and groundwater. Rigsrevisionen initiated the study in December 2012.

2. The RBMPs are the main instrument for implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) from 2000, according to which Denmark is required to achieve good status for all water bodies by 2015. The WFD was implemented in Denmark in 2003 through national legislation, *Miljømålsloven* (please see appendix 1 to the full report for an overview of Danish acts and executive orders on the RBMPs). The Danish counties were responsible for preparing and elaborating the RBMPs up to the time of the municipal reform, which took effect on 1 January 2007, at which point the responsibility was transferred to the Ministry of the Environment. The ministry is required to collect relevant data on the water environment and set concrete targets for the status of the water environment on the basis of the objectives for good status set by the EU. The ministry also has responsibility for elaborating an overall action programme describing the measures that must be implemented by the local authorities to achieve the environmental objectives. The ministry started preparing and elaborating the RBMPs when it took over the assignment from the counties in 2007.

3. The government and the local authorities share the responsibility for implementing the measures under the RBMPs. The municipal action plans prescribe how and when the local authorities should implement the measures in practice.

4. The background for Rigsrevisionen's examination is the fact that elaboration of the 1st generation RBMPs has been considerably delayed. The RBMPs should have been adopted by the Ministry of the Environment by the end of 2009, but are now expected to be adopted in the autumn 2014, i.e. with a delay of five years. Besides, the local authorities and stakeholders have in the course of the RBMP development process expressed dissatisfaction with both the planning process and contents of the plans. The ministry has now – while finishing the 1st generation RBMPs – started preparing the 2nd generation (2016-2021).

5. Preparing and elaborating the RBMPs is a complex task that affects many people and has huge financial implications for the government, local authorities and the citizens. At the same time it is a task that has the attention of the Danish parliament, local councils, regional councils, and affected interest organisations and citizens.

River basin management plans (RBMPs) set objectives for the environmental status of coastal areas, lakes, watercourses, fjords and groundwater. The RBMPs also describe the measures required to ensure good ecological water status.

6. The purpose of this report is to assess whether the Ministry of the Environment has prepared the RBMPs in a satisfactory manner. The report answers the following questions:

- Has the Ministry of the Environment planned and managed the elaboration of the 1st generation RBMPs in a manner that ensured the transparency of the plans and their timely delivery?
- Has the Ministry of the Environment based its preparation of the 2nd generation RBMPs on lessons learnt from preparing the 1st cycle of RBMPs?

MAIN CONCLUSION

Rigsrevisionen does not find the Ministry of the Environment's preparation of the 1st generation RBMPs satisfactory. The ministry's management of the project has been inadequate when taking into consideration the complexity and scope of the task. As a result, preparations were delayed and the municipalities were generally uncertain about the implementation of the 1st generation RBMPs, which should have been adopted in December 2009.

Planning and developing the 1st generation RBMPs required much coordination between the Ministry of the Environment and the local authorities. In some cases, the work was not appropriately organised, which affected the transparency of the basis for the preparation of the 1st generation RBMPs. The local authorities were involved in preparing and assuring the quality of the plans, but they did not feel that their views were duly considered by the ministry. Nor did they feel that the ministry kept them sufficiently informed during the process.

Rigsrevisionen finds that the Ministry of the Environment failed to plan and manage the 1st generation RBMPs with sufficient focus on ensuring the transparency of the plans and their timely delivery. The data used by the Ministry of the Environment in the initial development phase were inconsistent and obsolete and, in some areas, even affected by error. The data set was, among other things, based on data from 2001-2004 and even older. Subsequent efforts to ensure that the RBMPs are based on accurate data have been extensive and it has been necessary to scale back both the ambitions and the original objectives set for the 1st generation RBMPs.

The 1st generation RBMPs are expected to be adopted in the autumn 2014, i.e. with a delay of approximately five years.

In connection with the preparation of the 2nd generation RBMPs, the Ministry of the Environment has, in the opinion of Rigsrevisionen, in several areas used lessons learnt from the development of the 1st generation RBMPs. The Ministry of the Environment has now implemented project and risk management of the plans and expects to enhance the professional basis for the RBMPs, including the quality of data, through the implementation of new and improved methods for assessing the water environment.

The Ministry of the Environment intends to finish the 1st generation RBMPs while preparing the 2nd generation, which is considered a risky exercise by Rigsrevisionen. Rigsrevisionen is also of the opinion that there is considerable risk that Denmark will not be able to achieve good water status for all water bodies in Denmark by 2015, as prescribed by the EU Water Framework Directive.