

# The French Conservatoire du Littoral – The Coastal Protection Agency

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# Context of the audit

- In 2012, the 7<sup>th</sup> Chamber of the Cour des comptes audited the Conservatoire du Littoral. The audit covered the period 2006-2011.
- It was one of these audits the Cour carries out regularly on public entities. The previous audit of the Conservatoire was held in 2007.
- Each of the seven chambers of the Cour has to audit regularly the Government departments, the administrative, industrial or commercial government agencies, the State owned corporations, which belong to its area of competence. For example, the 7th chamber has to audit all these structures in its area which includes transportation, equipment, environment, town planning, urban and rural development, agriculture, and fishery.

# Presentation of the Conservatoire

- Its official name : Conservatoire de l'espace littoral et des rivages lacustres – The Conservatory of the Coastal Territory and the Lacustrine Shores
- This public administrative body was created by law in 1975 to ensure the definitive protection of outstanding natural areas on the coast, banks of lakes and stretches of water of 1000 hectares or more.
- The Conservatoire acquires land mainly by private agreement, sometimes by pre-emption or, more rarely, by expropriation. Land may also be given to it by donation or legacy.
- After ensuring the restoration work, the Conservatoire entrusts the management of its land to local authorities or other local groups or organizations. It uses specialists to decide how the sites should be managed and what activities (such as agricultural or recreational activities) can take place.

# Importance of the Conservatoire

- The Conservatoire cares for an area of 153 000 hectares for 1500 km of shoreline and more than 12% of French seacoast;
- Between 2005 and 2011, the Conservatoire acquired 19 500 hectares;
- It employs 150 people in Paris, in Rochefort and its regional offices;
- The financial resources of the Conservatoire amounted approximately to € 41,5 millions in 2010 ; the main part – approximately € 39 millions - was coming from the *droit de francisation des navires* (francization fee of the ships), affected since 2008 at the Conservatoire.
- If most of its budget is provided by decisions of the national government and Parliament, local authorities and the European Union also contribute, as do corporations and private donors.

# Main findings - 1

- **Several recommendations made in 2008 have been implemented :**
  - **Establish effective coordination with the *Agence des aires marines protégées* -Agency for Protected Sea Areas-, created in 2006 : a Charter of partnership was signed in 2009; the effort must be pursued, in particular for the guarding;**
  - **Improve management control: since 2009, efficiency indicators have been introduced;**
  - **Increase own resources, in particular through sponsorship : this objective was introduced in the 2009 objective contract; if quantified objectives have not been achieved over the period, sponsorship agreements have been signed;**
  - **Extending the right of pre-emption of the Conservatory: the law of July 2012 on a national commitment to the environment has decided this extension**

## **Main findings - 2**

- **Shortcomings still exist, which are harmful to the proper fulfillment of the tasks of the Conservatory :**
  - **Management still deserves to be improved in accountancy (definition of an internal control policy) and on the budget plan (improvement of the monitoring of commitments and the programming of acquisitions, works and studies);**
  - **The continued lack of regulatory status of the staff of the Conservatory, which leads to irregular payments to some members of the staff.**

## Main findings - 3

- Although their increase, the Conservatory means do not allow him to achieve the strategic objective that has been assigned to :
  - Increase in the number of staff : 21 % from 2006 to 2011; increase of the “droit de francisation des navires”, the main financial resource fee: 7 % from 2007 to 2012.
  - Since 1975, the missions of the Conservatory were expanded to: the public maritime domain in 2002; the wetlands of the coastal *départements* in 2005; the estuaries, the fluvial public domain and the lakes from 2009; in 2012 the protection of the cultural heritage of the coast, in which sixty lighthouses will progressively be transferred to the Conservatory.

- **The acquisition objectives of the 2050 strategy, which were set in 2005, would mean to acquire 5200 hectares yearly instead of 3000 hectares on average during the period.**
- **To achieve the goal – acquisition of 200 000 hectares on the French continental coast and 70 000 hectares in overseas *départements*- would require a doubling of the resources of the Conservatory, which seems unrealistic.**

# Recommendations

- In the letter from the president of the 7<sup>th</sup> Chamber to the Director of the *Conservatoire* and the Ministry's directors of central administration concerned, 11 recommendations about the missions of the *Conservatoire*, budgetary and accounting management, human resources management.
- In a special transmission, a so called *référé*, a letter from the first President of the *Cour des comptes* to the three ministers concerned, observations were made about the improvements since the last audit, the continued lack of regulatory status of the staff of the Conservatory and the maladjustment of the allocated resources to the strategic objective. Recommendations concerned : the adoption of a regulatory status of the staff, the revision of the strategy 2050 to adapt the objectives of land acquisition to available financial and human resources.

# Answers and follow up

- Ministers in charge of ecology, of the budget and of civil service answered.
- The work is in progress for the adoption of a regulatory status of the staff
- The minister in charge of ecology does not wish to call into question the objectives of the 2050 strategy and the ambition of the safeguarding of the 'third natural' coast. The Minister for the budget is more prudent and agrees with the idea to adapt the objective of acquiring to the financial resources likely to be affected at the Conservatoire.
- The “référé” and the answers have been sent to the Finance Committees of Parliament.
- During the next three years, the Cour will annually follow the implementation of its recommendations.
- A new audit of the Conservatoire will be conducted in some years.