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## Summary

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# Environmental sustainability in central government procurement

## – on the right track but a long way to go

### Summary

The Swedish National Audit Office (Swedish NAO) has audited whether central government efforts to achieve environmentally sustainable public procurement are effective. The Swedish NAO's overall conclusion is that many government agencies do not have a sufficiently well-organised purchasing process and sufficient environmental competence to be in a position to apply environmental considerations effectively. Further action is therefore needed by the relevant agencies, the Government and the government agencies that have supportive functions before the central government efforts as a whole can be deemed to be effective.

### Audit findings

#### Government agencies' work on environmental considerations in procurement needs to be improved

The procurements carried out by agencies vary greatly in terms of volume and content, and the responsibility for shaping the process concerning environmental considerations lies with each agency management. The Swedish NAO considers that, despite an increasing interest in this matter among government agencies, deficiencies are common concerning governance and organisation, competence and analysis material, as well as follow-up.

When government agencies do not have sufficiently structured processes concerning environmental considerations, there is a risk that the need to take environmental aspects into account is identified late in the purchasing process, making it difficult to allow time to prepare sound environmental requirements. The agency may also miss out on opportunities to take environmental aspects into account in other ways, such as selecting more environmentally friendly alternatives or reusing products.

Properly taking into account environmental considerations often requires both sector and environmental competence. However, the audit shows that many government agencies seldom analyse the environmental impact associated with procurements and that almost half of the government agencies consider inadequate access to environmental expertise to be an obstacle to strengthening their environmental consideration.

The Swedish NAO also considers that the government agencies insufficiently monitor the required environmental conditions. This carries a risk that the suppliers do not meet the required environmental conditions and leads to agencies' loss of valuable information for future procurements.

### Sound existing support needs to be used more

The Swedish NAO assesses that the National Agency for Public Procurement provides well-designed support for environmental considerations in procurement. The problems outlined above show that there is a need for this support and that it needs to be used to a greater extent.

The Swedish NAO also assesses that the central government framework agreements concluded by the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency provide essential support to government agencies as well as a sound approach to environmental considerations for goods and services of that kind. However, the purchasing agencies make little use of the opportunity to take additional environmental considerations in connection with their purchase.

### There are shortcomings in the follow-up of agencies' work on environmental considerations

The Swedish NAO assesses that there is no follow-up that gives a fair picture of the government agencies' level of ambition in their work on environmental considerations. This is because environmental considerations can be applied in various ways and whether or not they are well-balanced depends on the conditions in the individual case. This makes it more difficult to determine what type of initiatives should be carried out to push the agencies' work forward, and for government agencies to compare with each other.

The Swedish NAO considers that the Government has made it clear that the government agencies should have a high level of ambition in their work on environmental considerations. However, in the light of the deficiencies that the Swedish NAO has identified concerning government agencies' work, and the difficulty in measuring the level of ambition of the resulting environmental considerations, there is a need for the Government to continue to point out the importance of addressing environmental considerations in procurement.

## **Recommendations**

The Swedish National Audit Office recommends that the Government

- take measures that lead to an improvement in reporting on environmental considerations in procurement within the environmental management system
- task the National Agency for Public Procurement to regularly follow up the national procurement strategy.

The Swedish National Audit Office recommends that the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency and the National Agency for Public Procurement

- work together with the aim of disseminating information about the opportunities of taking environmental considerations in connection with purchases under the central government framework agreements.