

# Major measures to fight the drought are missing, the damages reached CZK 24 billion in the past year only

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The Supreme Audit Office focused on measures taken by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and the Ministry of the Environment (MoE) to mitigate the negative effects of drought and water scarcity between the years 2013 and 2018. The auditors examined the way in which each ministry handles the fight against drought, how it is financed, but they also looked at concepts and plans which the State has approved and under which it is to be managed. The audit has revealed that major measures to combat drought are missing, as well as necessary regulations. The existing subsidy programmes have not been adapted to address the issue of drought and new measures — with one exception — have not been put into practice. The fight against drought is also made difficult due to conflicting positions of the ministries involved.

Despite government plans, there is still no legislation to mitigate the effects of drought and water scarcity, which would set out the rights and obligations of individual entities. The issues of drought and water scarcity were to be addressed by the ministries on the basis of 49 tasks set out by the government in 2015. In many cases, the content of these tasks has been, for example, to prepare an analysis, draft a proposal, evaluate potentials and so on – however the tasks were not complemented by steps to introduce specific measures into practice and make changes with genuine impact.

New measures with a specific aim to resolve the issue of drought and water scarcity such as the construction of dams in regions affected by drought due to water scarcity, linking water systems to safeguard water resources and other measures, exist in written form only as a part of the government's policy<sup>1</sup>; the only exception is the subsidy scheme "Dešťovka" ("Rainwater"). The approach to growing agricultural crops for energy purposes, which the government had envisaged in its policy, has not yet been changed. The number of oilseed rape in Czech fields rose by 45 thousand hectares between 2015 and 2018.

The fight against drought is financed by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of the Environment by a number of subsidy schemes —in this area specifically, there are 37 subsidy schemes which were used to allocate almost CZK 28 billion between 2017 and 2018. In most cases, the schemes have been up and running for many years, thus they are not tailored to combat drought and water scarcity. Most of the schemes, however, did not define specific and measurable objectives for this area, so the ministries are unable to assess the actual effects of the allocated funds. Nevertheless, the damage caused by drought continues to rise — according to estimates of the Ministry of Agriculture, the damage amounted to around three billion Czech crowns in 2015, in 2017 it was CZK 7.7 billion and the damage rose up to CZK 24 billion in 2018.

In order to address drought, the cooperation of a number of entities is necessary. In the case of the two major ministries, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of the Environment, cooperation was not ideal. For example, the ministries disagree on the wording of the Ordinance on 'Erosion Control', the adoption of which is essential to improve the management of agricultural land and its ability to retain water. The auditors have also found that the ministries had supported conflicting measures — the Ministry of Agriculture had allocated funds for the construction of artificial watersheds of small watercourses, while the Ministry of the Environment promoted an opposite policy, artificial watersheds were being eliminated since the MoE believes that they accelerate the drainage of water from the landscape.

“Drought is a major problem and the damage caused by drought and water scarcity is growing. If we truly want to improve the situation, it is necessary not only to prepare fundamental projects, but above all to put them into practice,” said Pavel Hrnčíř, Member of the SAO, who was in charge of the audit.

**Communication Department**  
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