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**Aligning policy & practice:** governance & capacity gaps for Swedish local actors in the implementation of **ponds & wetlands**

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# Background

- Swedish government has supported **implementation of ponds and wetlands** by subsidies over the past three decades
- National initiative 2018-2023: **Catchment officers**
  - coordinate voluntary measures for improving water quality
  - working together with farmers/landowners
  - assisting in the process from start to finish
- **Barriers** that these local actors face when policy is translated into practice, and **potential solutions**, for more effective implementation of wetlands (*Eriksson et al., in prep*)



# Method

**Policy analysis:** 3 funding programmes, Swedish environmental code and objectives

**Interviews:** 3 catchment officers from 3 municipalities

**Workshop:** Focus on local level

**Interviews:** 4 officers at 2 County Administrative Boards

**Workshop:** Focus on national/regional level

**Survey:** Nationwide, 48 participants working with the catchment-based approach

**Interviews:** 6 survey participants with extensive experience of catchment-based approach



# Policy overview

## Ponds & wetlands regulations

### *Swedish environmental code*

- Water operations: Give notice (CAB) if <5 ha, or apply for permit (Court) if >5 ha.
- Apply for exemptions, e.g. protected biotopes (CAB) or “shorelines” (municipality)
- Applying for a reassessment or removal (Court) of land drainage associations (LDA)

## Main funding programmes

<i>Measures for:</i>	<b>LOVA*</b>	<b>LONA*</b>	<b>CAP**</b>
Biodiversity		✓	✓
Climate adaptation		✓	
Reducing eutrophication	✓	✓	✓
Reducing GHG emissions		✓	
Good Ecological Status	✓		
Increasing groundwater recharge		✓	
Water retention		✓	
Reducing human impact			✓
Reimbursement	90 % of costs	90 % of costs	100 % of costs
In advance	75 %	75 %	Ca 40 %

*\*state funding \*\*EU (ca 60%) + state (ca 40%) funding*



# Theme 1: Bureaucratic & admin-heavy processes

## Applications of notices/permits/exemptions

- Long waiting times for decisions cited as one of the biggest obstacles to effective catchment-based approach
- Majority of catchment officers rate the **processing times** for applications of notices/permits/exemptions **inadequate**

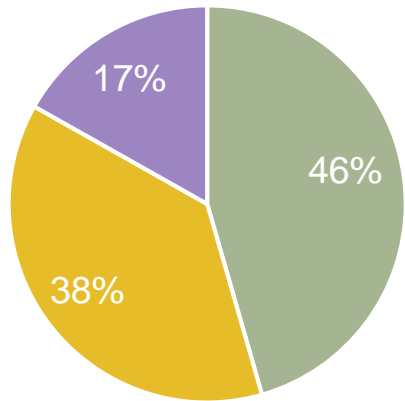
## Land drainage associations

- Detective work to find LDA's and their contact persons
- Many no longer active
- Majority of catchment officers avoid fully or as much as possible sites that are affected to LDA regulations
- Limits where ponds & wetlands are placed (i.e. effectiveness of measure)



# Theme 2: Lack of secure funding

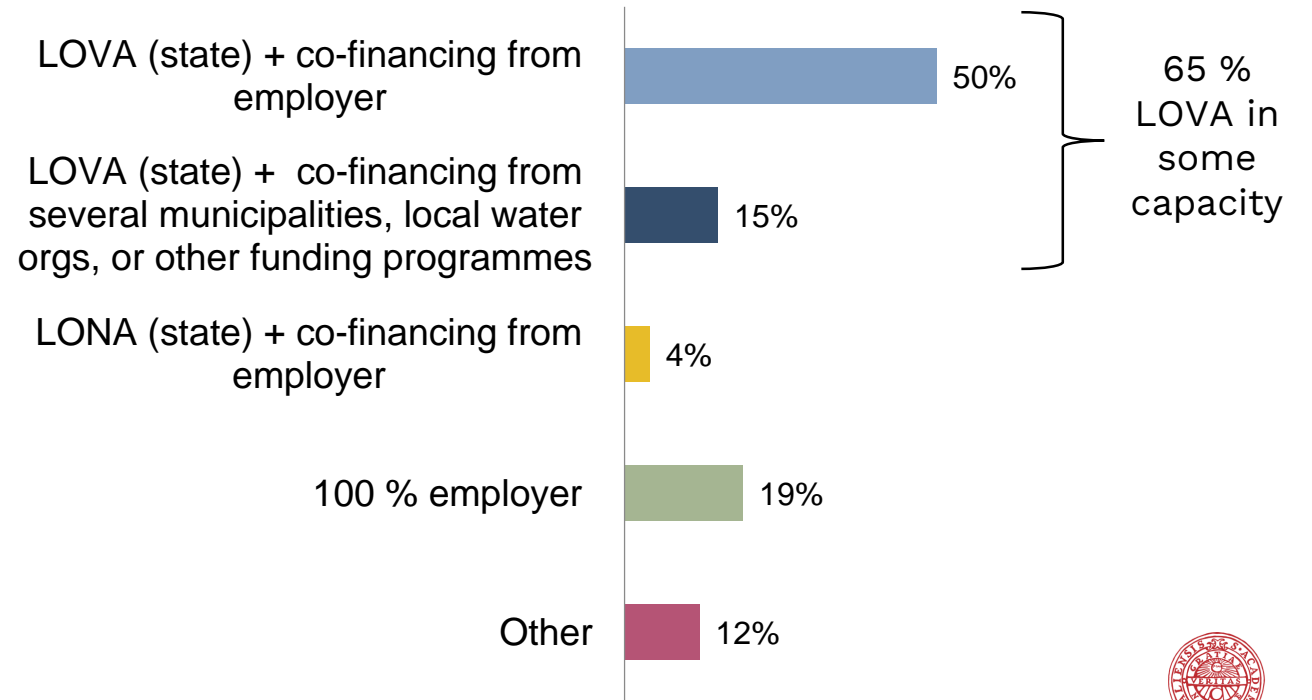
### Employment



■ Permanent ■ Fixed-term 1-3 år ■ Other

Majority of catchment officers agree that it is **difficult to fulfil their work during a fixed-term employment of up to three years.**

### How employment is financed



*Eriksson & Geranmayeh (2025)*



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# Theme 3: Lack of support and preparation

## Solitary work

- Often only one catchment officer in an organisation
- Lack of peer support
- No longer any national coordination of catchment officers

## Broad skillset needed

- Many catchment officers did not feel ready for legal, administrative, and social/communicate aspects of the role



# Theme 4: Working with voluntary measures

## Motivating landowners

- Takes time to build network and foster connections

## Lengthy start-up period

- Uncertainty about legal aspects of implementing ponds & wetlands for private landowners
- Smaller municipalities or local water organisations have no contracts for landowners or contractors, frameworks for public procurement etc. in place



# Theme 5: Funding

CAP difficult  


	LOVA	LONA	CAP
I am <u>certain of what is expected</u> in the funding application	85 % agree	79 % agree	18 % agree 41 % disagree 41 % either or
In the majority of funding applications I need to provide significant <u>additional information</u>	64 % disagree	55 % disagree	43 % agree 29 % disagree 29 % either or
It is <u>more difficult to apply for this</u> funding programme than others	82 % disagree	72 % disagree	82 % agree

Eriksson & Geranmayeh (2025)

Green indicates positive result, red indicates negative result



# Wrap-up: Suggested solutions

## Secure funding

Building trust in an area and working within current system takes time.

Removing the need for providing co-financing.

## Catchment officer network & resource catalogue

Regular meetings and continuous communication between catchment officers.

Centralised platform to gather existing resources.

## Simplified regulatory processes & collaboration with CABs

Better understanding of the internal processes at CAB to improve applications & predict outcomes.

Clearer guidance for interpreting regulations (better coherence across counties).





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Thank you!

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