

Auditor General Alar Karis commended on the results of the audit:

Every summer, the papers report about cases where someone has installed an unauthorised no entry sign on a path leading to a water body, blocked the path with a barrier or turned a public shore into a private beach. And yet, access to the sea, lakes or rivers and the freedom to roam there are everyone's fundamental rights. So why are we often unable to exercise these rights?

Private and public interests clash on paths that run along beaches and shores. Public interest means people's desire to get to the shore or beach, whether to swim, fish or just walk by the sea. Private interest, however, means the desire of the land owner to protect their privacy. The local government should help in such situations and, as a result of discussions with the local community, should define the roads and paths that visitors can use to access water bodies and where land owners cannot restrict the freedom to roam. It would also help visitors from further away if these roads and paths were marked with information boards or signs, which also make clear whether the water body can be accessed by foot or vehicle, and where the vehicle can be parked without disturbing others. Of course, signs and posters do not help if there is no good upbringing, which also includes the understanding that roaming on private land does not necessarily mean invading someone else's yard.

The audited local governments and the Environmental Inspectorate also shared these principles in the cause of the audit and hopefully, they will soon be taking steps to allow all of us to exercise our fundamental rights better than before and to access beaches and shores throughout Estonia without disturbing local residents.

Alar Karis

Auditor General

8 December 2015