

# Editorial:

## The Environment is Everybody's Business

We have been living in “the oldest humanised landscape in the world” as zoologist David Attenborough described the Mediterranean. It has a 46,000 kilometre coastline dotted with cities and harbours and a population around it of about 160 million people, which is expected to double within the next couple of decades.

It is also a very polluted sea, accepting effluent from surrounding countries and toxic substances from the large procession of tankers and smaller vessels that ply their routes in all directions. It is estimated that the Mediterranean carries 20% of all tanker traffic in the world.

The United Nations Environment Program report of some years ago found that 93% of shellfish taken from the Mediterranean contained more faecal bacteria than the maximum allowed by the World Health Organisation. The food chain is now heavily polluted by oil spillages.

It is practically tideless and almost completely isolated from the other oceans in the world, connecting only at Gibraltar and Suez. It has been estimated that it takes 80-90 years for its waters to be renewed, so that whatever gets dumped there, stays there.

Malta and Gozo form one of the most densely populated countries on earth. The inhabitants and their

leaders have not, in the past, been too worried about pollution. Open drainage has been directed into the surrounding waters for generations.

The mentality of the populace which thinks nothing of dumping rubbish into our valleys only to be washed away into the sea with the first rain has also contributed to the process of degeneration. I have a clear vision of Qawra bay (Dwejra) after the rain which was so polluted with quarry refuse that tiny octopuses sought refuge on land where they suffocated!

And then came the tourists – foreign as well as local. They are mobile now, visiting all bays of Gozo in a single day and often leaving a trail of debris behind them. While tourism might be considered a necessary evil, it cannot be allowed to become more evil than necessary.

Time was when a traveller to Malta from Gozo would be regaled with a show of dancing dolphins which accompanied the ship to Cirkewwa. Not any longer! They and all the other local fish have all but disappeared to be replaced by farmed fish stacked in fisheries which produce economic quantities of fish for export but which damage the habitat in no uncertain way.

The environment is everybody's business. The future of our seas, of our world, is in our hands.

