

Land Reclamation Out At Sea On a Small Mediterranean Archipelago (Maltese Islands) a White Elephant Or an Opportunity Worth Considering?

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Abstract: The Maltese Islands are a Central Mediterranean archipelago which house one of the highest population densities (1320/km²) in the world. Roughly one-third of the archipelago is built-up, with the corresponding average figure for the EU-28 being that of 5%. Despite this, the archipelago is still endowed with roughly 80 endemic terrestrial faunal species and 23 floral ones, with the Natura 2000 network encompassing 13% of the land mass of the same islands. The consequence of such a challenging background is a restricted spatial area which stifles the planning and development of further large-scale projects. Conversely, the terrestrial waters (12 nautical miles) extend spatially over an area which is almost 14 times the terrestrial one, although only ca. 13% of such waters are shallower than 50m. The islands are witnessing every-more burgeoning volumes of inert (C&D) waste being generated as a result of the construction industry's operations (over 2 million metric tons were generated locally in 2009 alone). Such a scenario has prompted Maltese authorities to issue in summer 2013 an international expression of interest for land reclamation proposals within Malta's territorial waters, despite two previous feasibility studies concluding that land reclamation on a large scale within Maltese nearshore waters was not feasible, both from an economic perspective and in terms of volumes of C&D waste generated locally. This study expounds on the multifarious environmental constraints facing land reclamation in Maltese nearshore waters as a result of the occurrence of protected species and habitats as well as elaborating on the impacts on the marine environment that such a development might have in future.