

Fixated with land reclamation



The Resources Ministry and the AFM's Maritime Squadron recently joined forces to manually clear Mġiebaħ beach of seagrass debris.

When last week Labour leader Joseph Muscat delivered further eulogies on land reclamation and its presumed virtues I swore to ignore any further Labour Party statements on environmental issues in view of their bungling nature.

Dr Muscat mentioned the Freeport and the Excelsior Hotel as the quintessential examples of land reclamation on our islands.

While the Freeport is an important cog in Malta's economic wheel, one need only ask people from Marsaxlokk and Birżebbuġa about the damaging effects

land reclamation had on the marine environment there. The previously lush seagrass meadows at Marsaxlokk Bay have silted up as a result of the severe hydrodynamic changes in the bay.

Does it not dawn on Dr Muscat that consideration must also be given to the underwater environment?

Outside Development Zone is an artificial construct that focuses exclusively on environmental concerns relating to land areas outside development boundaries. How about coining the term 'Marine ODZ' to remind politicians that although seagrass meadows and fish nurseries are out of sight and submerged below the waves they are equally worthy of conservation?

While Muscat favours land reclamation on the grounds that it would relieve some of the pressure on ODZ areas, he only lists yacht marinas as the type of development he envisages for reclaimed land. Why is the Labour Party so coy about coming clean on its real estate plans for reclaimed areas?

Referring to the Netherlands, with its extensive sand banks out at sea, which are almost completely absent in Malta, is also highly blinkered.

Opening up our seas to large-scale land reclamation would herald in unprecedented environmental damage.

Thumbs up to the Armed Forces, MRRA

The Armed Forces of Malta's Maritime Squadron recently deployed a dinghy, a barge and even the P32 patrol boat to assist the Ministry of Resources and Rural Affairs' beach-cleaning sections to manually groom seagrass debris from the remote beach at Mġiebaħ.

Praise is due not only for the grooming exercise per se but also for the fact that these entities resorted to manual means only to get the job done, rather than use heavy machinery.

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- Alan Deidun

The reason for this choice of strategy was that heavy-handed tactics at Mjēbañ would have caused too much ecological damage in view of the remoteness of the beach.

Finally, some sense.

Europeans opt for cleaner cars

In view of the government's commendable aim to boost the uptake of electric cars by providing rebates, it is worth reviewing the analysis of recent trends in car use in Europe by the European Environmental Agency.

The headline statistic emerging from the analysis is that the 12.8 million new cars sold in 2011 throughout Europe were 3.3 per cent more fuel-efficient than those sold the previous year, with the average carbon emissions for the cars being 135.7 grams of carbon per kilometre.

In order to cut greenhouse gas emissions from transport, car-makers have a collective target for the average car sold in the EU to emit a maximum of 130 g CO₂/km by 2015, and 95 g CO₂/km by 2020. The long-term reduction of emissions has been influenced by an increasing uptake of diesel cars, an ongoing trend which continued in 2011.

The gap between average CO₂ emissions of new diesel and petrol vehicles has been narrowing in recent years – in 2011 it was just 3.2g CO₂/km.

In 2011, 55.2 per cent of the vehicles registered in 2011 in Europe were diesel vehicles, an increase from 51.3 per cent in 2010.

In the EU, CO₂ emissions from road transport have risen 23 per cent between 1990 and 2010, becoming responsible for approximately one-fifth of the EU's total emissions.

Other findings from the same study include the following:

- Registration of new cars in the EU increased constantly between 2001 and 2007, peaking at 15.5 million cars, but has fallen continuously since.

Between 2010 and 2011 the number of new car registrations increased in many EU member states, notably Latvia (71 per cent), Lithuania (68 per cent) and Estonia (66 per cent), but fell in others, including Greece (-31 per cent), Portugal (-31 per cent) and Spain (-17 per cent).

- The weight of new cars increased slightly in 2011 and is now back to the level seen in 2007 before the economic crisis.

Nonetheless, engine capacity, measured in cm³, has decreased by five per cent compared to 2007.

- Registrations of vehicles using liquefied petroleum gas fell by 76 per cent between 2010 and 2011. This was mostly due to a sharp decline in up-take in France and Italy, countries where this fuel is most commonly used.
- There were 8,700 electric cars registered in 2011. While this is only 0.07 per cent of new cars registered, and did not significantly influence the EU average emissions, it is a 10-fold increase on 2010.
- Portugal, Malta and Denmark registered the most carbon-efficient cars on average, with emissions of 125 g CO₂/km or less.

New cars registered in Estonia, Latvia and Bulgaria had more than 150 g CO₂/km on average.

The full report is on: www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/new-cars-sold-in-2011

www.alandeidun.eu