

## Blue Flag double standards



Authorities call upon law-abiding citizens to help them in their quest for Blue Flag status for Golden Bay, but seem to turn a blind eye to those who have been flouting the law for years on end on the same beach.

The hype about local beaches obtaining coveted Blue Flag status is understandable from a tourism point of view but, in the case of Golden Bay, such a drive is misguided.

On the same beach, a catering outlet lies right in the middle of sand dune remnants at the mouth of the watercourse, complete with a flight of steps, through another section of dune remnant.

These same steps were torn down by the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (Mepa), only for them to sprout up once again in an act of sheer defiance.

The abolition of offroading on the same beach is also recommended to achieve Blue Flag status. One wonders if the operator of the same catering outlet still drives his four-wheeler over the sand early in the morning to gain access to his beach bar.

The Blue Flag programme should be latched upon by authorities to clear our beaches of any catering outlets that blatantly flout the law, rather than being used as a way of imposing double standards on our beaches.

### No place for peace and tranquillity

Picture the following scene: weaving your way through the citrus-fringed lanes down to the supposedly secluded beach of San Blas in Gozo early on a Sunday morning for some blissful peace and quiet.

My perception of San Blas was shattered when, upon arriving there, I was met with hideous scenes of makeshift bars on the sand and mounds of plastic bags filled with trash.

The narrow alley leading down to the beach was bustling with pick-up trucks lugging away speakers and other sound-projecting equipment, while a massive generator was lined up a few metres up the alley.

It was 6.30 a.m. and a big party held on the beach the previous night was coming to an end. Beer bottles were still strewn randomly across the sand and the party operators apparently worked up a sweat to remove all traces of debris from the beach, seemingly overlooking minute waste such as cigarette stubs and plastic wrappers.

What further irritated me was the sight of a Gozitan family that decided to go for an early swim and tried to find a way to the sea through this maze of party leftovers. When the authorities decided to grant permission for the party to be held at San Blas, they must have forgotten about family activities, such as going to the beach in the evening, when they saw they could make a quick buck.

There is demand for places that offer solace from stifling crowds. Alas, it seems that even backwaters like San Blas have become out of bounds to those seeking to enjoy stunning views away from loud music. And then people wonder why our islands lack turtle-nesting beaches.

### Recess time at Mepa

Holiday periods at Mepa are always greeted with a sense of foreboding by those with a genuine love for the local environment. The dire need for enforcement simply cannot fizzle out.

Take, for instance, the dumping of inert debris at Blata l-Għolja in Mosta. Residents filed a complaint with Mepa on July 23 but have still received no reply at the time of writing this article.

The dumping in question involved truckloads of material and residents are unsure whether this is another case of indiscriminate environmental spoiling or whether it is covered by a permit. They also claim to have seen asbestos pipes among the debris - again, no one to provide answers.

Everyone is entitled to a few days or weeks off work, but surely addressing enforcement issues should not be hampered in any way. With the Mepa reform in full swing, the recurring enforcement shortfall needs to be coherently addressed.

## **A welcome merger**

Few may have noticed that the Maltese Episcopal Conference announced on May 22 it was time that the former Environment Commission develops into an inter-diocesan one, which would also include the diocese of Gozo.

I must congratulate those responsible for such a merger, which should broaden the commission's local remit. Over the past few years, the Church's Commission for the Environment did not shy away from taking a stand on some of the most controversial issues - the Sant Antnin recycling plant saga, the rationalisation of development schemes, the abatement of CO2 emissions, village feasts and most recently, the Mepa reform.

The commission deserves praise, as it is one of those few voices in the chorus of pro-environmental organisations that combines scientific and technical know-how with active lobbying.

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