

## A more lasting way of respecting the legacy of Malta's British period



After all the window-dressing undertaken for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, one hopes that some resources will be found to rehabilitate areas off the beaten track, such as the extensive tracts of the Victoria Lines, which are in dire straits.

November 2015 will surely be seared in the annals of Malta's history as the month punctuated by high-profile, international meetings, with the Valletta Summit and this year's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) rendering our islands less of a backwater in the eyes of the rest of the globe. As is the norm in such meetings, the red carpet was unfurled and areas lining the itinerary the dignitaries took to and fro the meetings were spruced up in what is essentially a window-dressing exercise.

Away from the limelight, the list of historical monuments that deserve the CHOGM spotlight and treatment is endless, with perhaps Fort Ricasoli being the epitome of the doldrums in which some of our cultural/historical heritage currently lies.

However, perhaps it is opportune to focus on the state of the Victoria Lines, given that they share the same British period legacy with CHOGM. Sections of this iconic set of fortifications, such as the stretch at San Ġużepp tat-Tarġa, is literally in shambles and could certainly do with a facelift, even though CHOGM dignitaries might not get the opportunity to visit the site.

Another stretch of the Victoria Lines – the Dwejra Lines – is literally strewn with litter of all sorts, discarded after each Sunday when the area is used for picnics and barbecues.



The spotlight will be on Malta again during the CHOGM and one hopes that some of the resources being spent will trickle away from the velvet-lined route the dignitaries are made to take, and used for honourable cases such as the restoration of Malta's historical assets as well.

*Fort Ricasoli [is] the epitome of the doldrums in which some of our cultural/historical heritage currently lies*

**Taking the thunder out of fisheries**

In a sense, the timing of the Valletta Summit could not be more unfortunate. It coincided with the 24th regular meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) which started in Malta last Tuesday and is expected to end tomorrow. Migration being the limelight-grabbing subject that it is, inevitably the Valletta Summit completely obscured and eclipsed the ICCAT meeting, which attracted a pittance in terms of media coverage despite its relevance for the fate of fisheries in the Mediterranean.



Malta is currently hosting a meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), which should discuss measures to manage stocks of bluefin tuna and conserve a number of shark species. Photo courtesy of P. Cooke.

A number of local fisheries management advocacy groups, such as the NGO Fish4Tomorrow, as well as international groups such as the Pew Charitable Trusts, have all submitted their recommendations in the run-up to the meeting, especially in view of some sobering statistics concerning fish stock status. For instance, almost two-thirds of the fish stocks managed by ICCAT are considered to be overexploited.

A recurrent concern among most such advocacy groups relates to the surge in bluefin tuna fishing quotas endorsed by ICCAT last year in response to a recovery in the wild stocks of the species. In fact, last year ICCAT gave the green light to a 70 per cent increase in catch quotas by 2017 for the eastern population of the iconic species, while smaller increases in catch quotas have been sanctioned by ICCAT for the embattled western population of the species. It is only legitimate to have misgivings about the impact these catch quota surges will have on the conservation status of bluefin tuna.

Yet another bane of sustainable fisheries is illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. One example of such a despicable practice is trans-shipment at sea of caught bluefin tuna, which dodges all forms of scrutiny and controls on land by placing on the market illegally-caught bluefin tuna.

In order to stem this practice, in 2007 ICCAT mandated the Bluefin Catch Documentation (BCD) system, which tracks the movement of bluefin tuna individuals at every stage of their transit from the wild to the market. While the entry into force of the paper-based BCD system was a red letter day for sustainable fisheries, there is consensus nowadays that the system is in dire need of an upgrade in view of the ease with which documents can be forged.

The BCD's electronic counterpart – the eBCD – can stave off most such ongoing infringements by ushering in a digital data-collection interface.

No dates have as yet been set for the mandatory introduction of this system. However, as of January 1, 2016, all bluefin tuna-fishing vessels as well as all vessels longer than 20 metres will be required to register for an International Maritime Organisation (IMO) number. This will contribute to better traceability of the fish being consumed. One hope that this commendable development will eventually usher in the complete implementation of the eBCD system.

A variety of shark species dominate the conservation priorities in fisheries management in view of their bleak prospects. For instance, Pew Charitable Trusts have appealed to ICCAT to reduce the capture of sharks by prohibiting the use of shark lines and wire leaders. While sharks were previously mainly caught as bycatch, some species are increasingly being targeted, and concerns exist about the sustainability of fishing for the species, including the blue shark, the porbeagle and the shortfin mako. There are other species for which no scientific data supporting sustainable fisheries exists, such as the common thresher, the longfin mako and the night sharks.

Strident calls are being made for ICCAT fisheries not to contribute to the global overfishing of sharks. Will the meeting delegates still be receptive to these calls, amid all the cacophony around them?

[www.alandeidun.eu](http://www.alandeidun.eu)

[alan.deidun@gmail.com](mailto:alan.deidun@gmail.com)