

Contractors are still ruling, above and below the waves



This carob at San Ġwann will not be transplanted, as workers on site tried to hoodwink residents into believing.

Last week saw the umpteenth desecration of a carob tree of a venerable age, this time in San Ġwann, on the edge of the scheduled valley of Wied Ghomor. Despicable though this was, some behaviour still manages to stand out in terms of sheer gall.

For instance, when faced by livid residents at Triq il-Baltiku, the burly operators of the heavy machinery doing short work of the carob tree wheeled out the customary cliché “No need to be concerned as the tree will be transplanted”.

In their rush to cut corners, contractors are making a mess of the environment

- Alan Deidun

Seeing the pitiful state to which the carob tree had been reduced, residents were not buying this.

Secondly, it transpires that the San Ġwann council and Enemalta had held several site meetings and discussions on how best to transplant the two carob trees (since two had to be transplanted); this would involve the slight pruning of the trees and the prior identification of a suitable location in San Ġwann to host them.

The contractor in question simply rode roughshod on what had been agreed upon and chose the shortest way out – doing away with the trees by uprooting, bulldozing and chopping them up – cutting corners at its best. No wonder our islands are treeless.

Last time I checked, Mepa were investigating the case, as reported in the local newspapers. One wonders what the outcome of these investigations will be and whether the contractor in question will be given an exemplary fine, or whether the whole thing will be allowed to fade into oblivion.

No sooner had the dust settled on this brazen act that this column got to know of further environmental fouls by the same contractor, this time below the waves.

The company was given the green light by Mepa to reinstate the berthing facilities at the Ta' Xbiex marina after they were privatised. The company entrusted with the revamping of the Ta' Xbiex marina is actually a joint venture with an Italian company which was stopped in its tracks by Transport Malta earlier this year while carrying out rehabilitation works at No. 1 Dock in Cospicua.

During the currently ongoing renovation works at the marina (work on three of the 15 pontoons on site has been completed to date), in order to cut corners, and save time and effort, the

contractor is failing to recover all the debris strewn on the seabed at Ta' Xbiex associated with the previous berthing facilities.

Instead, it is simply deploying the new steel chain, concrete sinkers, nylon rope and any other paraphernalia on top of the existing material, without bothering to recover the previous redundant material.

The material in question is quite voluminous – we are speaking here of hundreds of tons of steel chain, at least 25 km of nylon rope (since roughly half of the original 50 km length is being recovered by the contractor) and about 300 concrete sinkers one metre square, all of which are being abandoned on the seabed.

The metal in the chain could at least be sold as scrap. Needless to say, such debris will be a hazard to marine life as well as an obstacle to future attempts to dredge the area. The debris is possibly also a hazard to vessels berthed above, even through static electricity it inadvertently generates. As aptly shown in one of the accompanying photos, the previous chain is literally rubbing off any veneer of galvanisation that the new chain might have, making it susceptible to premature corrosion.

Since there is still time, albeit very limited, to reverse the environmental damage being wrought on the seabed at Ta' Xbiex, Mepa and any other monitoring authority is being called upon to oblige the contractor to abide by good environmental practice.

It is disconcerting to see that, in the absence of a local environmental monitoring authority with enough clout and resources to see that misdemeanours do not happen, contractors, in their rush to cut corners, are literally making a mess of the environment.

No lessons learned from Brignone case

The dust has hardly settled on the tragic death of the snorkeller Charles Brignone at Munxar, close to St Thomas Bay. However, any lessons that might have been learned from the unfortunate incident have long been forgotten.

St Thomas Bay is still characterised by jet skis speeding way above the 10 knot limit imposed on seacraft within 300 metres of a beach – in fact the same jet skis normally venture within 50 metres at most of the swimmers' zone on site, with complete impunity.

Any snorkeller venturing beyond the swimmers' zone is warned not to trespass. Here again, resources to guard against contraventions at sea are sorely lacking.

Commendable and innovative initiative at Tarxien

Tarxien council, with councillor Ishmael Dalli as the catalyst, along with ReFab textile recycling and San Andrea School, recently organised a commendable and innovative initiative, whereby discarded textiles and fabrics were collected in a bid to reduce the volume of such waste, ending up in the engineering landfill and to bolster the volume of recycled textiles on the islands.

In fact, the collected material will be dispatched to Northern Ireland for reconditioning or for shredding into raw material.

The event was a veritable success – a staggering one and half tons of such waste were collected. The local council has another laudable initiative in the pipeline, this time targeting waste computer material. Thumbs up!