

## The real environmental issues



The marine area around Filfla is still waiting for the approval of the management plan, which would pave the way for some urgent protection measures.

It is praiseworthy for the Nationalist Party to engage the major environmental exponents to try to identify the most pressing local environmental problems.

Such a move is largely unprecedented, especially at party level. However, the presence of a small number of domineering exponents from the pro-development lobby, who dominated proceedings, has once again ensured that a skewed view of the environment prevails.

I was engrossed in rebutting some of the preposterous proposals from the pro-development side. As a result, a number of issues were completely bypassed.

There has not been a comprehensive commitment to protect our coastal and marine resources. Despite being an island, endowed with a 270-km-long coastline and a marine area over 20 times our terrestrial resources, we need to safeguard our marine resources from overexploitation. Spear-fishing takes place even within the marine protected area at Dwejra, and we have net fishing over popular wreck sites, such as Ċirkewwa.

We need to bolster research on the implications of climate change on marine eco systems, we need to increase the number of MPAs, and fulfil the recommendation made by the Structure Plan over 15 years ago. The marine area around Filfla is still prone to wanton and unregulated exploitation and disturbance.

We need to adopt a long-term strategy to stop biodiversity loss in this country. While much hype exists over the 2020 renewables target, very little is actually dedicated to the 2010 targets set by the European Commission to halt biodiversity loss in member states.

While the Malta Environment and Planning Authority claims that 97 per cent of all local species of international importance are currently protected by legislation, laymen and decision-makers have no idea whatsoever of what is needed to this effect.

Camping, offroading, land reclamation and road-opening in supposedly protected areas, such as garigue at Pembroke and Baħrija, the clay slopes at Ġnejna, maquis above Mistra Bay, continued unabated this summer, without anyone batting an eyelid.

It is symptomatic of each summer that even nature protection goes on vacation.

We need to allocate more funds towards the management of protected areas - a large number of 'protected' sites in this country are meek paper tigers, serving only to bolster a statistic about the number of local Special Areas of Conservation.

Dwejra, White Tower Bay (Mellieħa), Pembroke garigue and il-Ballut (Marsaxlokk) are just three of the protected areas crying out for some badly-needed active management and protection measures.

One may argue that appreciating the complexity of environmental issues is only possible through brainstorming. Experience shows that some individuals are bent on furthering their perspective of what the environment is. They clamour for the entrenchment of a building ban in

Outside Development Zone areas simply to bolster the market price of their within-scheme properties.

A gratuitous piece of advice for the next round of discussion - only those with a genuine passion for our environment should be invited to such talks and not individuals who view the environment as a gravy train.

## **Squatting over public land**

Parliamentary Secretary Jason Azzopardi has bitten the bullet and is seeking to move squatters from public land. While such a stance deserves praise, Azzopardi should go all the way and unravel several other contentious public land issues, besides those relating to billboards and tourist zones.

Such a sentiment was also elaborately expressed in the The Times' online forum, with various readers asking about whether any action is going to be taken on the blatant squatting at Baħar iċ-Ċagħaq and Għajn Tuffieħa barracks, and the 'boathouse villages' at Ġnejna, Armier and St Thomas Bay. These issues may exceed the remit of any politician - maybe Azzopardi will prove me wrong and break the mould.

## **Laudable initiative by HP**

Hewlett Packard (HP) announced last August that it has qualified all business PC, printing and server products shipped throughout the US and Canada for the US Environmental Protection Agency's Smartway logo labelling programme.

Smartway is an innovative partnership between the EPA and the freight industry. The programme's goals are to lower carbon dioxide emissions by 33 million to 66 million tons annually by 2012 and nitrogen oxide by 200,000 tons annually, along with additional reductions in particulate matter and air toxins. The initiative will result in fuel savings of up to 150 million barrels of oil annually - or the equivalent of removing 12 million cars from the road.

## **Burning of vegetation close to sports facilities**

Footballers playing at the Centenary Stadium at Ta' Qali are treated to a continuous blanket of stifling smoke billowing from the surrounding fields.

Neighbouring farmers have a knack for setting fire to their fields, obviously without any form of authorisation, during sports activities, with the consequence that athletes' lungs are exposed to an array of air-borne chemicals, namely dioxins, cyanide and polyaromatic hydrocarbons, most of which are carcinogens.

Authorities would do well to enforce a ban of any form of burning within a cordon surrounding the stadium.

## **Natural History course by Nature Trust (Malta)**

Nature Trust (Malta) is resuming its series of natural history courses in October, with a short evening course consisting of three two-hour lectures and two fieldwork sessions.

Aspects to be addressed include tenets of the local geological setting and the Mediterranean climate, adaptations of local plants, local natural habitats, faunal assemblages and environmental protection measures.

The course should appeal to all local natural heritage enthusiasts. Special discounts are being given to students, the elderly and members of NGOs. The deadline for applications is September 30, to me or to [info@naturetrustmalta.org](mailto:info@naturetrustmalta.org).

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