

More beach privatisation



Paradise Bay - no place left for a towel, courtesy of indiscriminate beach privatisation.

The sterling work of those responsible to keep beach concession operators in check is being undone every time permits are given for private parties to take place on beaches.

Further to the desecration of San Blas beach that I reported in this column on August 23, yet another gross injustice was witnessed at Paradise Bay on August 20. Two security guards were posted at the top of the flight of steps leading down to the beach to advise people going down that most of the beach was cordoned off to the public due to a private function.

Those who rightly chose to ignore such advice were greeted with a veritable cordon, which acted as the dividing line between the privileged few who could pay to bask and dine in glorified white gazebos and the rest of the people, who were cramped into a narrow sliver of sand bordering the sea and whose towels were regularly washed by the swell.

This preposterous situation, which is clearly pictured in the photo, lasted for a whole day.

It may be apt to remind those entrusted with issuing permits for such parties that a mere 2.4 per cent of the Maltese coastline is sandy and this translates into a just handful of beaches. This paucity of sand is further reduced by numerous beach concessions and, to cap it all, we now have parties regularly plonked on the few remaining accessible sandy areas.

Methane at Magtab

An article in The Times some weeks back on harnessing the dangerous gases emitted by the Magtab dump led to some misconceived comments being posted on timesofmalta.com. The thrust of most of the comments was that although originally Wasteserv had said it would be generating electricity from such gases, it was now releasing them into the air.

Although they are housed in the same area, Magtab and the Għallis and Żwejra landfills are essentially antonyms of each other - the former is an open landfill/dump while the latter two are engineered landfills.

At Magtab, the small amount of methane that rises to the surface (through 400 steel wells) is burned in order to generate the high temperatures needed to drive equipment which in turn treats the toxic gases emitted by the dump. True, the methane at Magtab is not being used to generate electricity but is being used to drive the toxic gas-treatment plant, which would otherwise draw on the mains electricity supply.

At Żwejra and Għallis, the situation lends itself more easily to the generation of electricity from methane due to the controlled conditions at the landfills. In fact, at these two dumps, around 50 per cent of the landfill emissions is methane, significantly higher than the two per cent found in emissions from the open Magtab dump. As a result, its electrical power generating potential is much higher, coupled with the fact that the two engineered landfills generate much less toxic gas to be treated.

So rather than recklessness on the part of Wasteserv, the reason the methane is being used differently is that the amount of this and other gases being emitted from the two types of landfills at Magtab are different.

Sea urchin craze

Several diver friends of mine have reported what seems to be a surge in people's appetite for the edible sea urchin (rizza) this summer, judging from the telltale sight of prized-open urchins strewn along the shore. Two areas popular for such urchin feasts seem to be Anchor Bay and Wied iż-Żurrieq.

The edible sea urchin is included in Schedule VIII of Legal Notice 311 of 2006, which lists those species of animals whose taking from the wild and exploitation should be subject to management. Despite this, there is no closed season in place for the catching of sea urchins; nor are any formal regulations regarding the taking of the species.

Will this lack of management of the edible sea urchin result in a spectacular decline of the species, as happened some years ago?

The ODZ mill

A total of 84 Outside Development Zone (ODZ) applications were submitted during July of which a few referred to proposed new dwellings, mainly in areas like Gharb (PA 02779/09), Rabat (PA 02883/09), Għaxaq (PA 02433/09), and Xagħra (PA 02052/09).

Predictably, numerous applications proposed sanctioning past misdemeanours, with a few being quite brazen in their expectations. For example, PA 04739/08 calls for the sanctioning of a store, garages, stables and other structures and boundary walls built at Ta' Żgamardi, Siġġiewi, with application also proposing other additions and alterations.

A significant number of ODZ planning applications to set up heritage trails at Mellieħa (Selmun) is remarkable, as is the number of applications to upgrade 'wasteland' off Triq il-Buskett in Dingli, and of a walkway along Wied Hażrun.

Hopefully, such 'upgradings' do not do away with the natural character of these areas to replace them with environments polluted by human activity, and that operators seek scientific guidance prior to embarking on such projects. Degraded garigue or steppe landscapes are often perceived to be wasteland, thereby justifying heavy-handed human interventions to such sites.