

## Concrete poured on Marsalforn coast



Literally on the eve of election day, someone decided to pour concrete on the rocky coastline at Marsalforn, presumably to extend parking facilities on site. Mepa is investigating.

Illegality louts seem to creep out of the woodwork at election time, assuming they will get away with their misdemeanour given that public attention is understandably distracted by the electoral fever. One such case concerns a seaside location in Marsalforn, where concrete has been poured over the rocky coastline, literally on the eve of the general election.

Was the concrete poured so as to facilitate parking of vehicles along the coastline?

Enough natural coastline has been smothered for human use around the islands and the authorities should nip such 'initiatives' in the bud.

### Access to Mġarr ix-Xini Kantra closed

The recent installation of a gate severing public access to a beach club (actually, a wooden shed holding beach furniture) and to the coastline along the idyllic Mġarr ix-Xini Kantra has raised many an eyebrow, with many questioning the legality of the action, especially since the Malta Environment and Planning Authority had recently asked the owner to remove this and another gate further inland.

It now transpires the action is completely legal as the beach club is an ancillary facility of the Ta' Ċenċ Hotel, the owner of which also owns the Mġarr ix-Xini Kantra. Whether or not this entitles the owner to close off the Kantra and its coastline to all and sundry is an issue I won't go into, since, despite the various attempts by the Ramblers' Association and others, no one has been able to give an unambiguous definition of the public's right to access to the coast.

### Opportunity along Żonqor coast

The 2.5km stretch from Żonqor Point in Marsascula (near the former National Pool) to Xgħajra has the potential to be one of the most accessible coastal walks around Malta. In fact, this stretch is one of the few undeveloped coastal areas where one can walk unhindered to the coast in view of the accessible and gently sloping landscape.

The site's accessibility, however, has been its undoing over the years, with tons of rubbish peppering the coastal stretch. The rubbish dumped on site ranges from construction rubble, some of which has solidified over the years and has been colonised by vegetation, to fresh debris, discarded TV sets and even the odd piece of furniture, as can be seen from one of the accompanying photos.

A golden, albeit challenging, opportunity beckons for the new Labour administration. Although clearing this rubbish is a Herculean task in view of the sheer volume of waste dumped on site over entire decades, sprucing up the coastal stretch (without overdoing it – no pink concrete or obtrusive amenities please) could very well transform it into the most rewarding coastal walks in the south of the island.

### Tar poured on cliffs

As can be seen in the accompanying photo, a large amount of tar has been poured over a stretch of cliffs between the Il-Mara promontory and Hal Far, along the south-western tip of Malta. Cliffs are one of Malta's most sensitive land habitats, yet they harbour a large number of endemic species, with cliff plant species (known as rupestral species) featuring a number of unique adaptations.

The authorities concerned should install surveillance facilities on site to prevent further dumping and attempt some sort of restoration of the cliff habitat.

## **Red-letter day for the protection of sharks**

The 16th Conference of the Parties (CoP) of the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), held in Bangkok earlier this month, ended with two-thirds of member countries agreeing to upgrade the level of protection given to five species of shark and to manta rays.

This landmark decision was welcomed by diverse groups of countries, including the EU and many South American and West African countries. This is understandable, considering that it follows two similar unsuccessful attempts in previous CoPs held since 1994.

The five shark species include the oceanic whitetip, porbeagle, scalloped hammerhead, great hammerhead and smooth hammerhead, most of which are indiscriminately hunted as fodder for shark fin soup in the Far East or sometimes even for their meat.

Manta rays, whose gill plates are highly prized in the Far East, are another elasmobranch species which is very vulnerable to human exploitation in view of their low reproductive rate. In fact, adult female manta rays rear a pup only every two to three years, with most populations being highly fragmented and small in size, except for a single 5,000-strong population in the Maldives.

For further information visit [www.cites.org/eng/news/pr/2013/20130314\\_cop16.php](http://www.cites.org/eng/news/pr/2013/20130314_cop16.php).

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