

Bring on the turtles



Haphazard parking on the beach at Ġnejna is the norm every summer. Will the recent turtle nesting change that?

It takes a momentous event – a loggerhead turtle laying its eggs on a local beach – to drive some sense into local authorities and oblige them to take the bull by the horns, for once. For instance, the six-month conservation order recently issued for Ġnejna Bay prohibits a number of actions on the beach, including the playing of loud music and parking of vehicles, which in civilised countries would normally be associated with people lacking education and manners.

The mind boggles... why weren't such measures enforced earlier? Is it acceptable to have people shattering the peace and quiet with music thumping away from big speakers lodged on trucks, as regularly happens during barbecues held on the rocky peninsula at Ġnejna, as long as there are no turtles nesting on the beach?

Is it acceptable to have people shattering the peace at Ġnejna, as long as there are no turtles nesting on the beach?

- Alan Deidun

I have serious doubts as to whether the conservation order will actually be enforced... can we seriously expect the security guard/s on site to manage to persuade certain unsavoury characters to turn down the music or not to offroad on the sand?

Did anyone from the Malta Environment and Planning Authority actually visit Ġnejna during the height of the summer season, when innumerable vehicles park on the roadside fringes of the beach, which is anything but a safe haven for turtles?

If the laudable conservation order is to be successfully implemented the presence of enforcers on site must be beefed up.

All those who crave a modicum of propriety and mutual respect on our beaches must hope for more turtle nestings and conservation orders on our beaches – bring on the turtles and banish uncivilised behaviour from our beaches.

Where is Leo Brincat?

My criticism in this column two weeks ago of Joseph Muscat's pledges to developers once in power is even more justified following the Labour Party leader's latest statement in favour of land reclamation and dubious 'agritourism' projects which would entail 'construction'.

Muscat might be forgiven for making statements about the possible extension of the Mġarr Harbour yacht marina while he was touring Fort Chambray, as he might not be acquainted with the information available about the marine ecology of the area.

But land reclamation has been studied so exhaustively locally, in particular through the commissioning of at least two fully-fledged studies – by Carl Bro in 2005 and Scott-Wilson in 2009/2010 – that the Labour leader should have been more informed of the implications of land reclamation.

The limited experience Malta has had with land reclamation does not bode well for similar ventures in future. One could mention the construction of the Freeport terminal, the hard-standing fishing boat facility at Marsaxlokk, and the dumping at sea of inert waste at the spoil ground off the Grand Harbour, where spillages from barges along the route and the non-deployment of silt curtains are the order of the day.

I would also have expected a politician of Muscat's calibre to avoid cheap rhetoric and to avoid downplaying technical reports, when asking: "Why did the Malta Environment and Planning Authority say land reclamation isn't feasible?"

The answer is simple... Mepa 'said' so because the experts it commissioned to conduct the studies reached that conclusion, and if Muscat read the relevant reports he would know how and why they reached this conclusion.

Overriding expert opinion and watering down or even bypassing the Environment Impact Assessment process, just to pander to populism, is dangerous and reminiscent of the 1970s and 1980s.

There are many inconsistencies in the Labour leader's stance on the environment and development projects. Why (laudably) object to the Gozo tunnel and then promote land reclamation? After all, the tunnel would generate the huge volume of construction debris you would need for land reclamation.

Why does Leo Brincat (laudably) lambast the rationalisation (extension of development boundaries) scheme in 2006 and Mepa for each Outside Development Zone permit granted and then Muscat promotes ODZ agritourism projects?

Why are the Qala Labour Party councillors (laudably) against the Hondoq ir-Rummien project while Muscat promotes the extension of the Mġarr yacht marina?

Why lambast incineration, which may be viewed as an abdication of waste reduction commitments, and then promote land reclamation, which thrives on waste generation and would thus foil any attempts, however feeble, to cut down on the generation of inert waste?

Muscat rekindled the ominous spectre of further ODZ development, especially in Gozo, and of future attrition with environmentalists when in the interview with The Sunday Times on June 17, he said:

"I am being very clear with environmentalists. I am telling them there will be times when tough decisions will be taken, where we need to draw a line... I talk about the need for agritourism projects, which are hosted in fields, and of course, these involve construction."

Against the backdrop of Muscat constantly making pledges towards specific projects and developments, one wonders whether Brincat, the Labour Party's spokesman for the environment, feels comfortable with such stances, or whether he deliberately shies away from accompanying Muscat when the latter makes such statements, since he is at odds with them?

Brincat is normally a vociferous critic of numerous government environmental policies, not least where climate change, water policy and the development boundary extension are involved. He is normally very conversant with the environmental themes he discusses, as shown by the extensively-researched articles he writes. So his silence in this case raises more than one eyebrow.

Could the real Leo Brincat please stand up?

Blue Lagoon or dumping lagoon?

While many people waffle about the Whistle-blower Act, which still fails to materialise, there are already many conscientious citizens out there who act as whistle-blowers by exposing environmental misdemeanors from the shadows.

For instance, a good friend of mine recently alerted me to a despicable act of one of the main Comino ferry boat operators, with whom he has business ties. My friend witnessed employees of the operator sail to the Blue Lagoon in Comino, under cover of darkness, at around 3 a.m., to construct an impromptu jetty at the lagoon to service their boat, and disposing of the construction debris generated during the process directly on site, in the sea.

The authorities, who are perennially bogged down by a chronic shortage of resources, especially on matters related to the sea, are being constantly foiled by the ploys resorted to by such unscrupulous people.