

No lull in infringements



Despite repeated calls by concerned citizens, authorities have failed to clear the despicable dumping at Wied Hesri in Siggiewi, strewn for weeks now with fridges and the lot.

The stupor we are currently in is not reflected in a lull in preposterous green infringements, as this visual panorama indicates.

Aarhus Convention and the right to public information

The Aarhus Convention, signed in 1998, was named after the Danish village that hosted the contracting parties. It has been described by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan as "the most ambitious venture in environmental democracy undertaken under the auspices of the United Nations", since it caters for the public right to environmental matters.

In addition, a new "environmental democracy" clearing house is being launched by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) to highlight and promote awareness of issues covered by the Aarhus Convention. The clearing house showcases good practices in citizens' environmental rights and is expected to make implementation of the Convention more effective.

Visit aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org

Despite this, to date MEPA chose not to reply to Nature Trust's queries on Wied il-Kbir and the Golden Bay flight of stairs (both illustrated on these pages). Admittedly we are in the middle of the summer lull, but pending planning issues should not be allowed to fester, especially since unscrupulous developers usually grasp this opportunity to flaunt their illegality.

MEPA's lack of response is also seen in the Dar ix-Xemx saga, with the MEPA Website still bogged down in April 2004! Isn't it time to update the Website on such a case? Such a reticence does not bode too well with the adoption, as last Thursday week, of a new European law, the Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), under whose auspices Maltese and other European citizens will from now have a greater influence on decisions affecting their environment.

As of yesterday, the environmental effects of a wide range of public plans and programmes must be assessed under better and more open planning procedures.

Land up for grabs on a massive scale

It seems that our insatiable drive to develop land knows no bounds - statements by the Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and the Self-Employed, Edwin Vassallo, on the launching of a business plan by his secretariat are proof of this.

One of the aims of such a plan is the development of 200 tumoli of land for micro-enterprise parks. The figure certainly makes one cringe, especially in a small country like ours - can Mr Vassallo clarify whether such development will take place in committed industrial zones or in pristine areas?

There are about 5 million sq. metres of land in industrial estates, or two per cent of our surface area - hence, ample room to accommodate such SMEs - no need to earmark other areas, like the T'Alla u Ommu one, which has long been in the sights of the same secretariat.

PA 03708/04 refers to the development of the international fair grounds for international and domestic fairs, including multipurpose use of halls, and to develop existing reservoir and adjacent lands for sports/entertainment facilities and to incorporate landscaping works at Ta' Qali, Attard - more public green spaces up for grabs?

Silver linings

Application number 01562/03 (site at It-Tafal ta' L-Imdina off Triq Gorg Borg Olivier, Rabat) referring to the construction of a residential complex consisting of 60 apartments, five penthouses and underlying garages was rejected on August 3.

One gleans from the grapevine (since there's nothing official on the MEPA website) that Dar ix-Xemx at Nadur in Gozo is not be tampered with in any way for at least the next six months.

Can MEPA substantiate such rumours?

MEPA's Green Point of August 10: "Stay off sand dunes. These are held together by plants that grow on them, and if these get removed or disturbed, there is little that will stop the sand from blowing away" - can we actually start staying off dunes? Some enforcement on a Sunday afternoon on the White Tower Bay, Ramla and Golden Bay dunes would certainly help.

Important dates

Tomorrow at 2 p.m. DCC at MEPA to decide on Wied Garnaw waste storage depot

Update: two months have passed since the first reports received by MEPA regarding the illegalities at Mgiebah - long past the 16 days stated by Mr Gingell, MEPA's PRO.

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