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## **Mgiebah development and obsolete MEPA**

Mellieha residents are livid that, despite their numerous exhortations to the Malta Environment and Planning Authority, the rape of pristine garigue at Xaghra tal-Girdellu, Mgiebah, has been allowed to proceed without the same MEPA batting an eyelid.

At the time of writing this article, more than two weeks have elapsed since the first reports reached MEPA about the illegal building of a room on what was once thyme-spattered garigue and the illegal scarifying of the same garigue to dump debris and open an access road.

A concerned citizen from the area, Raymond Sammut, is understandably livid that MEPA have put the onus on him for not recognising the perpetrators of this infringement, since now MEPA has no face and no name to which to issue the enforcement notice for the case - isn't it MEPA's innate duty to identify perpetrators and demolish illegal buildings as soon as they sprout, rather than being bogged down in lengthy enforcement procedures?

The bottom line is that if I decide to build a room in a field surreptitiously, MEPA cannot issue me with an enforcement notice! What will MEPA now decide to do - lie in waiting to see who will occupy the recently build room (which probably is the prelude to a lavish building in a few years' time)?

I was the first to advertise MEPA's weekend enforcement numbers and I am the first to lambaste MEPA for its laissez-faire attitude when it comes to nipping illegal development in the bud.

Any mitigatory action to be taken by MEPA pales in the face of the fait accompli that the same MEPA has allowed to proceed unhindered - enforcement officers, the police, bulldozers and any other necessary paraphernalia should have been sent on site during the illegal room construction phase-- the developer will now be emboldened enough by MEPA's haplessness to even apply for sanctioning.

The Tal-Mignuna/Mgiebah area is protected under the Flora, Fauna and Habitats Regulations of 2003 as a Special Area of Conservation. In addition, it is scheduled as per GN 400/96 and partly protected as per LN 012/01.

This plethora of legislation is amounting to a morass of wishy washy drivel since it is not backed by effective enforcement. Despite the recent mass recruitment of staff, MEPA's enforcement powers appear to have become redundant.