

## Yes to reclamation on land



Mepa Enforcement asked the owner of this land to remove the wooden gate and the pillars serving as jambs which had blocked public access to the small bay along Mġarr ix-Xini Kantra. The owner has since complied. Photo: Stanley Farrugia Randon/Din L-Art Helwa.

With the Labour Party favouring land reclamation, one might be forgiven for overlooking the significance of massive reclamation exercises being conducted on land, which involve the reinstatement of vast swathes of land which were previously in a decrepit state.

A fitting case in point is the new family park at Marsascala to be inaugurated today, which was formerly a dilapidated and tumbledown landfill site dating back to the 1970s.

The following mesmerising figures testify to the gargantuan task that the project team at Marsascala faced and to the

scale of the recycling of materials conducted on site. The park covers a total area of 85,000 square metres, equivalent to over 10 full-size football pitches.

A total of 16,000 cubic metres of recycled inert material were used for the capping of the dumpsite, while 3,500 cubic metres of rubble were used for the construction of rubble walls. A total of 5,500 cubic metres of boulders from excavation works at the Għallis landfill were used for the rip-rap (foundation) of the watercourse.

Commendably, footpath lighting blocks were constructed using a mixture of concrete and recycled glass, for which 50 tonnes of recycled glass were used.

A watercourse was created in the northern part of the park to address the flooding problems faced by Inspire each year. The capacity of the watercourse is approximately 4,200 cubic metres per hour at any one time.

The project includes two reservoirs with a total capacity of 1,692 cubic metres, to be used to irrigate the approximately 3,500 trees and 25,000 shrubs planted in the park.

The Magħtab and Tal-Qortin landfills beckon, although the restoration of these sites is more dodgy than that at Marsascala in view of the mixed nature of wastes dumped over the years at these sites.

*Land reclamation is rubble-hungry, and would conflict with attempts to promote management of construction debris in Malta*

## **No to land reclamation at sea**

The PL has firmly entrenched its pledge for land reclamation at sea in its electoral manifesto, despite local studies indicating the non-viability of such schemes and underlining the environmental impacts of such reclamation. These impacts have been likened to those arising from the dumping of dredged material ('spoils') into the sea, such as more murkiness and less light penetration in the water column and the obliteration of benthic habitats.

The Carl Bro (2005) and Scott-Wilson (2010) studies indicated the coastal area off Xgħajra as the most suitable local site for land reclamation. As the prevalent surface currents in the area are mainly north-westerly, it's not far-fetched to anticipate that if there is large-scale dumping of rubble at sea in the area a plume of milky-white water would invariably be generated, spreading southward towards Marsascala and beyond.

As part of the Scott-Wilson land reclamation feasibility study, a stakeholder meeting was held in September 2007. During the meeting, it transpired that given the huge volume of construction debris that a feasible land reclamation project would need, the private entity involved (since prohibitive costs preclude government from embarking on this alone) would have to either consider importing construction debris from abroad or step up efforts to generate debris locally.

In fact, although it might come across as an oxymoron, our islands do not generate enough construction debris in the short term – crunching the numbers reveals that Malta generates circa 1.3 million tons of construction debris annually, while anything between five million and 20 million tons of debris would be needed for a feasible land reclamation project (unless one goes for a midget bay-refilling exercise).

From where would such volumes of debris be procured is anyone's guess – the dumping of a volume of debris several times that dumped at Malta's marine spoil ground over several years should send shudders down the spine of anyone who even remotely cares for the sea. Land reclamation is rubble- and debris-hungry, and thus would conflict with attempts, feeble as they might be, to promote management of construction debris in Malta.

Salient conclusions of the study may be viewed at:

[www.mepa.org.mt/EIACMS/documents/landreclamation/Technical%20Report%202%20Volume%20Appendix.pdf](http://www.mepa.org.mt/EIACMS/documents/landreclamation/Technical%20Report%202%20Volume%20Appendix.pdf).

## **Access to Mġarr ix-Xini Kantra**

People who cross over to Gozo for their regular rambling have often commented on the progressive cordoning off of sections of the Kantra at Mġarr ix-Xini.

The Kantra is a small headland or peninsula protruding to the side of the Mġarr ix-Xini, within which there is a small cove. Most of it is privately-owned and a permit was recently granted for a small wooden kiosk to be erected on site to provide beach furniture.

But it seems the owner went a step further and installed pillars, functioning as jambs, and a wooden gate on site, effectively barring access, not only to the wooden kiosk, but also to the cove at the tip of the Kantra.

Laudably, the Malta Environment and Planning Authority's Enforcement section asked the owner to rectify matters. The owner heeded the warning and removed the illegal gate, along with another one installed in the vicinity.

## **Economic evaluation of Natura 2000 sites**

Although they play a pivotal role in safeguarding biodiversity and protected habitats and landscapes, the economic contribution of Natura 2000 sites to the GDP of the EU bloc had so far been elusive. Now, a pioneering economic valuation of the Natura 2000 network suggests that the overall economic benefits provided by the Natura 2000 network could range between 220 and 310 billion euros per year.

This estimate factors in the average value per hectare of land enclosed within the network and discounts other services provided by the network, such as an enhancement of tourism related to Natura 2000 sites (€9 to €20 billion per year), while it is more elusive to estimate the economic value of ecosystem services, such as natural hazard mitigation, pollination and water provision, emanating from the network.

The study is available at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/financing/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/financing/index_en.htm) .

[www.alandaidun.eu](http://www.alandaidun.eu)