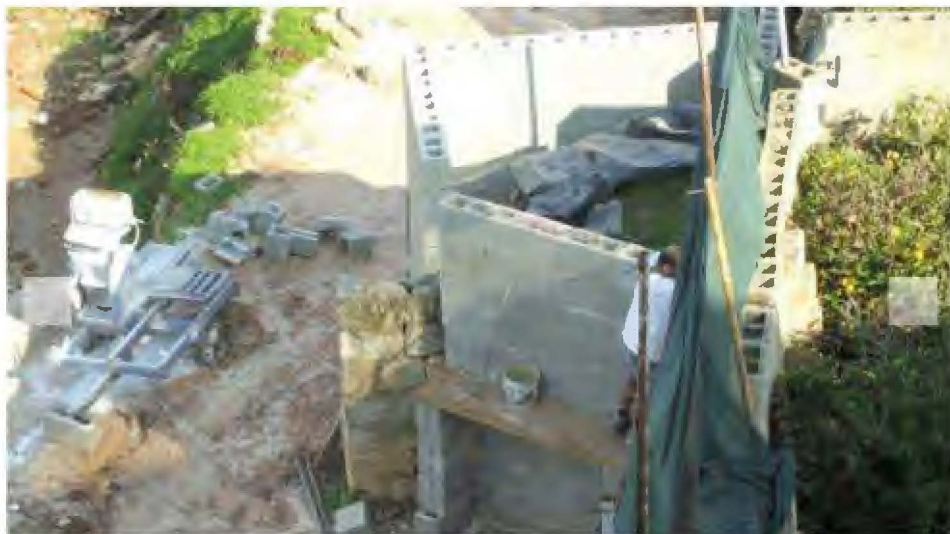


## Recreate Environment Ministry



The 'protection' of the square girna at the Wied l-Ghasel site.

The recent proposal to split the Interior Ministry into at least two offshoots, segregating responsibilities for the police from those for justice, spurs me to make a proposal to address a sore point.

The environment is currently bundled together with tourism and culture within a Parliamentary Secretariat. Although Mario de Marco has earned his stripes by successfully juggling all three portfolios, I trust he will agree that he has too much on his plate.

*I trust Mario de Marco will agree that he has too much on his plate*

**- Alan Deidun**

The new draft National Environmental Policy necessitates a tailor-made ministry that can champion the environment to the rest of the government. The decision to lump environment with other duties to create a leaner Cabinet was valid enough, but it is now time to re-establish an Environment Ministry.

### **A contradiction of an environmental award**

The recent presentation of the Waste Minimisation Award to Hilton Malta, and its honourable mention for the Management of Sustainable Development, as part of the Environment Award for Enterprise, smacks of contradiction.

While one can argue that the Hilton management is successfully minimising the waste it generates and running the hotel as efficiently as possible in terms of energy and resource consumption, one cannot forget the wider context within which the Hilton is situated – the Portomaso project.

The current application to extend the footprint of the Portomaso project pours cold water on the Hilton's laudable environmental achievement. The application, which proposes 46 new dwellings, 98 parking spaces and the latest fad of them all – a lagoon (also touted in the revamped Qala Creek proposal) – has rightly raised the hackles of residents and non-residents.

One of the conditions laid down when the original Portomaso project was given the green light in 1995 (probably to pacify the vociferous protests against the development back then) was

that no further development on the site would be allowed. Surely, permit conditions cannot be overturned so easily.

Rather than using technical arguments, the architect resorted to the 'precedent' argument often used by developers, saying at the last public consultation meeting that several other developments at the Portomaso project site have been permitted since then.

It is legitimate to ask: How many of these previous developments at Portomaso encroached on such a large undeveloped site?

A further condition in the 1995 permit was that the responsibility of safeguarding two protected plant species found at the site (Maltese sea chamomile and Southern wedgefoot grass) lay squarely on the shoulders of the applicant.

Since it has transpired that the latter species can no longer be found at the site, will the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (Mepa) take action against the applicant according to law, or will impunity prevail?

In view of the valid arguments raised by objectors to the proposed Portomaso project extension, Mepa should give the thumbs down to the proposed extension or, at least, commission a second Environment Impact Assessment rather than simply update of previous one, especially since the proposed extension is not exactly small in terms of footprint.

### **Stone hut – out of sight, out of mind?**

The photo above (left) shows the square corbelled stone hut (girma) at the site of the ongoing development in Wied I-Ghasel. It is reputed to be at least 130 years old, and is being hidden away by concrete bricks, sand and grit.

Mepa said this is a temporary precautionary measure to ensure the girma's integrity during the construction phase and was undertaken by the developer so as not to forfeit the hefty bank guarantee tied to the girma's integrity.

However, the photo on the top, right, shows just how close to the girma the construction is taking place.

It hurts to see such a large construction development sprawl along Wied I-Ghasel.

One can only speculate where the murky run-off water from the construction site ended up after the heavy rains of the past few weeks.

### **Energy from olive grit**

An EU-funded En-x-olive project has supported the conversion of olive oil wastewater into energy through innovative bio-reactor technology and the extraction of by-products from the olive oil industry.

The project is achieving two aims – it is producing valuable biogas and extracting valuable products such as polyphenols.

The latter are anti-oxidants with many different uses, including as nutritional supplements in the pharmaceutical industry.

The project, led by a Spanish technical institute, also aims to generate water for irrigation and fertiliser as by-products of the process, as well as contribute to the economic stability of rural Mediterranean areas involved in olive-growing by providing alternative sources of income.