

No more fireworks factories



On my wish list for 2013: Enforcement to stop the deployment of trammel nets (parit) close to the core zone of Marine Protected Areas, such as in Dwejra.

I am an avid aficionado of fireworks and parish feasts in general and I strongly believe fireworks have an intrinsic role to play in our feasts. But having said this, the Labour Party's pledge, made by Michael Falzon, to tweak existing planning policies so as to usher in more fireworks factories in Outside Development Zones, specifically in Gozo and Comino, is preposterous to say the least.

Some of the most remote areas in the Maltese islands, such as Gharb Valley in Gozo and Wied Qirda in Żebbuġ have already been blighted by the development of such factories, which makes rambling in these areas apprehensive, to say the least.

Reduce pressure on fireworks factories by introducing quotas on the quantity let off by individual village feasts

- Alan Deidun

This apprehension is shared by farmers tilling their land in the vicinity of fireworks factories, which presumably are not insured against damage to third parties, which include agricultural facilities, residences or in the worst-case scenario, lives.

A legitimate question to ask is: are such factories insured against collateral damage to third parties if they explode?

The Labour Party's call to sacrifice more of the islands' remotest sites to more fireworks factories seems to be based in the argument that Malta should not import Chinese fireworks. All those who cherish a walk on the wild side of nature would consider the latter a much lesser evil than the former.

As if we don't have enough RTO (short for riservato or 'reserved' in Italian) signs in our remote areas as a result of bird shooting and trapping, quarries, and due to illegal development such as boathouses.

Comino especially, should remain a reserve where any form of development is taboo.

Floating the argument that more factories are needed to stave off pressure on existing factories is also a non-starter – the only way to reduce such pressure is by introducing quotas on the

quantity of fireworks let off by individual village feasts.

The 'industry' can only ensure its survival by abandoning entrenched positions and adopting the 'less noisy, more colourful' as its slogan.

My wish list for 2013

As 2012 gradually folds up and 2013 increasingly looming large, it's time for wish lists for the next 12 months to be wheeled out. Here are some environmental aspirations I'd like to see as part of the political creed at the helm of the country:

- Implement tangible management measures in our Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) – for example, buoys to demarcate the boundaries of these MPAs and regular surveillance and enforcement to stave off practices not permitted in the MPAs, such as the deployment of trammel nets (parit) close to the core zone of the MPAs;
- Extend by a further 10 years the 10-year moratorium announced in 2006 on the further extension of the building schemes/zones;
- Concrete action being taken by Architect David Pace (who has a tough act to follow as the replacement of Malta Environment and Planning Authority auditor Joe Falzon) on pending investigation cases under his portfolio as Commissioner for the Environment;
- More financial resources being passed on by the Government to environmental NGOs, most of which are struggling to survive;
- Greater synergy between Mepa and environmental NGOs to avoid mutually detrimental situations as the Villa Mekrech case;
- The cessation of the odious strategy of both political parties pandering to lobbies with environmental demands, such as the sanctioning of illegal developments (such as boathouses) or the opening up of further zones for development;
- Further direct action by Mepa to demolish illegalities, especially those in ODZ areas;
- Malta's ratification of the Ballast Water Management agreement of the International Maritime Organisation, which is aimed at controlling the spread of alien species worldwide through ships' ballast water; this would help this important agreement come into force since Malta's vessel register is considerable.

Air Malta and Andalucian olive oil

While I was enjoying a meal during a recent trip on board an Air Malta flight, the origin of one of the salad dressings on offer raised my eyebrows. The olive oil made available had the Spanish region of Andalucia proudly emblazoned on its wrapping. I wonder why Malta's national carrier has to resort to importing olive oil originating thousands of kilometres away rather than stocking Maltese olive oil, whose quality is just as good.

The benefits of opting for Maltese produce are twofold: it avoids the considerable carbon footprint of shipping in produce from outside the islands and it supports Maltese agriculture, which in turn should be offer protection against further development of our green spaces.

The same argument applies for greater local appreciation of Maltese-grown wine.

Vehicular access to Chadwick Lakes

Mepa's recent scheduling of Wied Qlejgha (better known as Chadwick Lakes) as part of the wider Salini watercourse network, is doubtlessly commendable, not just for the site's ecological value but also for its status as a popular walking trail for families on Sunday afternoons.

In this context, I would like to repeat a call I have often made in this column for vehicular access to the narrow road leading to the watercourse to be prohibited during a short time window on Sunday afternoons to avoid the anomaly of having ramblers being continuously pushed aside by passing vehicles.

During this time vehicular access should be limited to genuine farmers with land in the locality.

Such a move should not rock many boats and would greatly enhance the walking amenity of Chadwick Lakes by giving momentary solace to visiting families from having to dodge vehicles.

Enforcement needed at Buskett

Following calls made in this column, Mepa issued an enforcement notice (EC 424/12) for a site in Buskett. This consisted of a farmhouse where the reservoir was roofed to create an elevated terrace and two rooms were also built illegally adjacent to the farmhouse, thus increasing the residential capacity of the farmhouse in what should be a sensitive area.

It is a parrot's secret that Buskett is a coveted site, and the wider Buskett area is peppered with enforcement notices.

For instance, one particular enforcement notice (EC 00345/02) was issued 10 years ago in the same alley in Buskett, known as Tal-Lhudi, in relation to "excavations, roofed semi-basement garage and opening of apertures in existing garage".

While praising the authority for the large-scale direct action it recently took against illegalities one hopes that it will soon deal with this and similar enforcement notices which are quiet long in the tooth.

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