

Storing manure in the open



Manure being stored in the open air during the rainy season at a livestock farm in Gudja. Such illegal practices could lead to more nitrates in our already beleaguered groundwater.

The photo published above was taken at a livestock farm in Gudja, close to Żejtun's Tal-Barrani Bypass. It shows manure being stockpiled in the open air, with no cover whatsoever, during (and throughout) the rainy season.

This contravention, along with the fact that the area is probably an aquifer recharge zone, is not good news for our already beleaguered groundwater. It is relevant to point out that 13 of Malta's 15 aquifers have very high nitrate levels.

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- Alan Deidun

The irony of it all is that legal provisions exist for this sort of thing not to happen.

According to the 2005 Code of Good Agricultural Practice and the Nitrate Action Programme (Malta's response to the EU Nitrate Directive, released by the Malta Resources Authority in August 2012), all farms are meant to construct sheds to store all solid manure under cover during the closed season (autumn, winter and early spring).

The Nitrate Action Programme states that "the capacity of storage facilities for livestock manure of a holding shall be sufficient and adequate to provide for the storage of all the livestock manure which requires storage between October 15 in any year and March 15 of the following year", and "responsible storage is necessary to protect the local environment from the harmful effects that 'run off' from manure can have if it enters watercourses or ground water".

The background of the photo also shows haphazardly amassed heavy vehicles in what seems to be a rapidly expanding impromptu heavy vehicle hoarding area.

Ah, the joys of the Maltese countryside.

Would Lidl alleviate Gozitans' suffering?

Some of the arguments being posted online in connection with the news that the permit for the Lidl supermarket in Xewkija are incredible.

Some of the most preposterous of these arguments refer to Gozitans' suffering in being forced to cross over to Malta to benefit from the cheap deals one only gets at this supermarket chain.

People holding such views are not realising that Gozitans' real suffering is caused by their island's sustained urbanisation.

The urban conurbation surrounding Victoria has already merged into surrounding villages such as Kercem, Munxar and Xewkija, blurring the distinctiveness of the latter villages.

Gozo is fast losing its trademark rural fabric, which is unravelling to make way for kitsch development – such as supermarkets rubbing shoulders with farms, or scrapyards next to touristic attractions.

If we take the generally undeveloped Gozitan landscape for granted by misguidedly aspiring for the so-called 'commodities' to be found on Malta, we are simply condemning Gozo to becoming an appendix to Malta, complete with the grinding traffic jams and haphazard development. People will look elsewhere for some peace and quiet.

There's no end to the desecration of Baħrija

Baħrija has seen its fair share of desecration in recent years at the hands of unscrupulous developers and speculators, and there is no respite in sight. In the run-up to Easter, Nature Trust volunteers noticed the levelling of a big stretch of land at Il-Ponta tal-Qliġha in Baħrija, along the meandering route leading down to Ras ir-Raheb.

Malta Environment and Planning Authority enforcement officers were quick to swoop down on the area, despite workers being observed on site even after sunset, since the permit for the site (PA/03390/05) for the construction of an agricultural reservoir had expired, along with a number of other infringements being investigated by the enforcement team.

Incidentally, the permit was issued in 2007 after two previous refusals. Hopefully, the issuing in the first place of such permits in Outside Development Zones is being hampered by the reform of Mepa.

Opposition to EU tax on airline emissions

Airlines contribute an estimated two per cent of the global human-induced carbon dioxide emissions and the EU has long aimed to include aviation and maritime carbon taxes in the EU Emission Trading Scheme.

The entry into force of the aviation tax on January 1, 2012, (EU Directive 2008/10/101/EC) has been met with animosity by a dozen non-European states, notably the US, Russia, China and India, with private US companies even opening civil suits against the EU for the move which most states have deemed illegal in terms of international law.

India, too, has been very vociferous in its attack on the EU move, banning all Indian airline companies from paying the tax and even from sharing carbon emission data with the EU. India even went as far as to claim that the EU's unilateral imposition of the tax sounded the death knell for any future climate change deal which could have been struck.

The EU counters such arguments by saying that airlines could easily have absorbed the tax which could, as a result, not pose any burden on the airlines. The EU estimates that compliance with the tax would have meant a €4 to €24 price rise for long-haul round trip flights.

Although the directive came into force this year, no bills will be issued by the EU before 2013, as fees for this year have been waived – perhaps a sign of things to come?

A positive decision on Balluta Valley

Mepa recently stood its ground by refusing the requested descheduling of part of the upper reaches of Balluta Valley from a Level 2 AEI to a Level 3 buffer zone, which would have seen development along this part of the valley, which literally borders the valley floor.

This would have effectively meant that the valley would have been turned into a passage of water, with development hemming in the valley bed on both sides, repeating the fate of the lower reaches of Wied l-Ghomor in Swieqi.

Well done.