

Cleaner, healthier and safer

Sergio Mallia

The Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment together with the Malta Environment and Planning Authority are in the process of introducing a series of initiatives with the aim of having a better urban environment.

Last April an initiative, together with all Local Councils, to address negative environmental and safety impacts created by vacant sites was launched. Unattended vacant sites within urban areas, end up many a time being unscrupulously used as locations for dumping all sorts of waste by irresponsible individuals. These sites become a true eye sore and a threat to the health and well being of our citizens.

This initiative calls for the building of a boundary wall after such sites have been adequately cleaned, to close off these vacant plots, which have become an injury to amenity. A set of basic building criteria to ensure the construction of such walls in an acceptable manner has been issued by MEPA.

Since the 16th of April, MEPA is being advised of such sites by the relevant Local Council. MEPA is reviewing these sites and will issue enforcement notices, wherever relevant. If the site is not adequately cleaned and a boundary wall is not built within 3 months from the issue of this notice, then MEPA will commission the Local Council to act as its contractor, and do the necessary works itself. MEPA will then reimburse the Local Council of all expenses and will collect back all expenses and all relevant fines when a development application is submitted.

The initiative has had an immediate positive effect with many owners of such sites immediately complying without the need of enforcing the requirement. Furthermore we received over a hundred complaints through the various local councils within our first two months operation. Over half of these complaints

were rectified by the owners of the sites after being contacted through our enforcement officer.

Littering is unfortunately another problem which these islands have to deal with constantly. Our citizens, whilst strolling along our streets, beaches and countryside are more than familiar with the pet litter, papers, wrapping papers, bottles, cans, cigarette butts, and sometimes even heavier waste and dumping material which give our environment a shabby and dirty look.

MEPA, in conjunction with the Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment, will shortly be launching a new initiative to address this problem. A number of ex-Dry Docks employees from the Industrial Projects and Services Limited (IPSL) have been identified and have been trained by MEPA to act as Environmental Field Inspectors. MEPA has also contracted the services of a private partner, a warden agency, Aurelia Asset Protection Limited, to help with the management of this initiative.

These inspectors shall be patrolling the Maltese Islands in particular the most frequented areas ensuring that the litter regulations are observed. The Inspectors have already commenced with the education part of this exercise. A number of these inspectors are patrolling various areas of the Maltese Islands, identifying persons in the actual act of littering, making them aware of their actions and asking them to clean up the mess immediately. Over the past few days these inspectors have noted over 30 cases of minor littering varying from pet littering to general littering. These persons were approached by the Environmental Field Inspectors who ensured that the litter was cleaned up. An improvement in the attitude of our citizens especially in the monitored areas has been very evident. It is enough to

state that in one particular area, over 25 persons were noticed cleaning up after their pets, on one particular morning. The Environmental Field Inspectors shall be also monitoring sites outside development zone. In fact these Inspectors have already evidenced heavy dumping of scrap and inert waste in environmentally sensitive areas and have been in contact with the police who shall be taking legal action against the offenders.

In the near future, MEPA shall be officially launching this initiative, introducing our private partner, and initiating a further 3 weeks intensive training for these Environmental Field Inspectors. The education campaign shall continue for a couple of weeks following which a date shall be announced when these regulations shall be enforced and punishable by the relevant fines.

Whilst being aware of the importance of the building industry for our islands' economy, we can-



not overlook the negative impact that certain current building practice have on the urban environment including the inconvenience caused to both neighbors and visitors. Dust emissions, noise, dirt, spillages and unsafe walkways are just to name a few.

The Ministry and MEU in conjunction with MEPA is currently drafting new regulations, namely the Environmental Management Construction Site Regulations, to limit these negative impacts whilst safeguarding the building industry.

These regulations have already been issued for consultation with the public and other stake holders. Comments have been received and are being considered and soon the final draft of this legislation will be finalized.

MEPA, who shall be undertaking the enforcement of these regulations, is taking the opportunity to use this time to train its personnel to be in a position to start with the enforcement of the new regulations once these come into force.

The Interreg III C Parks Network Project

Odette Kerr and Martin Psaila

The Malta Environment & Planning Authority has published a set of ten posters depicting protected areas and protected species in Malta. These posters were launched in December 2006, and were financed by the Interreg III C Parks Network Project, making good use of €7100 of the funds allocated to Malta for "Promotion" in 2006.

Colourful and attractive, the main aim of the posters is to promote the natural beauty of the Maltese environment amongst the partners of the Parks Network Project. However the posters will also be used to raise public awareness on the local level. In fact the posters are double-sided; one side is in English and the other in Maltese. This will help to reach the largest audience possible, on a national and international scale.

Three of the posters depict protected sites in the Maltese Islands:

- Wied il-Mizieb — a small valley from which various rare and endemic plants are known. The largest population of *Tetraclinis articulata* in Malta can be found here.
- Ir-Ramla — a sand dune community in Gozo. A large variety of plants, animals and mushrooms unique to sandy substrates may be found in this site.
- Il-Ballut tal-Wardija — an area characterised by an old forest remnant based on Holm Oaks, as well as a small coniferous woodland of Aleppo Pines.

Another three posters depict protected species in the Maltese Islands:

- Bats in Malta — The poster depicts ten bat species which have been recorded in the Maltese Islands and are legally protected. All bat

species in Malta are threatened because of various human impacts.

- Orchids in Malta — About 40 orchid species have been reported from the Maltese Islands, a number of which are legally protected.
- Maltese Trees — there are around 60 Maltese Trees;

and the poster shows some of the Maltese trees which are legally protected.

Furthermore, four smaller posters were produced illustrating indigenous or endemic Maltese threatened species. Each of these posters focuses on one particular species:

- The Sandarac Gum Tree (*Tetraclinis articulata*) — a rare coniferous tree which is also the National Tree of Malta.
- The Maltese Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis urvilleana*) — an endemic rare orchid found in the Maltese Islands.
- The Maltese Freshwater Crab (*Potamon fluviatile lanfrancoi*) — an endemic freshwater crab which is rare and endangered.
- The Maghrebian Mouse-Eared Bat (*Myotis punicus*) — the largest bat found in the Maltese Islands, and is legally protected.

The species in these posters are very clearly portrayed, with their main features shown prominently, together with their Maltese, English and scientific names.

The posters are all in full colour and printed on good quality paper with a gloss finish. This was done to ensure that the posters are attractive and successful in delivering their message — to increase appreciation for the natural heritage of the Maltese Islands.



Point to Ponder: How many of us can fit on this speck?

Saviour Formosa

Did you know that Malta stand second in line to Singapore as the most dense country in the world? With the subsuming of Macao and Hong Kong into China, we have been promoted to the unenviable second post!

So, whilst we have a density of 1240 persons per square kilometer (psk), a deeper analysis shows that this ranges from a leisurely 74psk in Ghasri to 22,610psk in Isla. Now that as great as Bombay! How's that for Comparison?