



THE ENVIRONMENT REPORT 2008



THE ENVIRONMENT
REPORT
tracking the environment

Malta Environment & Planning Authority

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FOREWORD

Environmental concerns have an increasingly high priority in Maltese society, so it is important to keep track of progress and challenges in this area. The Environment Report, which is published every 3 years, helps us do that by monitoring trends related to the most important environmental parameters.

The Report diagnoses the current situation of our environment today and provides us with a holistic picture of Malta's environmental challenges, looking at all sectors and policy areas affecting the environment. In a simple and attractive way, it gives readers a broad understanding of environmental trends, as well as their causes and consequences, with the aim of building up public consensus around issues where action is needed.

In this time of economic slowdown, it is heartening to find that considerable progress is being made in addressing some crucial issues such as air pollution and bathing water quality. However amid the significant improvements the sector has accomplished over the past years, the Environment Report also highlights the growing pressures Malta is facing in areas such as waste management, biodiversity protection, water management, and control of traffic emissions, as well as the ongoing pressures on land. Malta also needs to sustain efforts towards decoupling of economic activity from emissions that give rise to climate change, as well as damaging local air quality. The measures to support energy generation from alternative sources announced in Budget 2010, as well as previous budgets, will help move Malta closer to the low-carbon economy that the global community is increasingly recognising as necessary for future prosperity.

The 2008 Environment Report helps us examine not only the state of the environmental media, but also allows us to examine what this means for Maltese society – for our health, and for our economy. It is very interesting to learn, for example, that the environment is directly used to produce approximately one-fifth of employment, and one-sixth of value added. This should help us understand that the environment is the responsibility of all of us, because it affects us and our future health and prosperity intimately. Reading the Report, one gets a sense of the need for environmental stewardship across government and with all citizens. As the Report states, we all need to take ownership of the environmental situation. For Government, this translates into a need to ensure more effective integration and coordination amongst responsible entities, and to ensure our political commitment to taking action on the issues highlighted. MEPA is committed to do this, and I invite Maltese society as a whole to join us in this ambitious task.



Austin Walker
Chairman, MEPA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2008 Environment Report presents an overview of the state of the environment in Malta in 2008. It highlights that while Malta's population has largely met its basic material needs, the population continues to place unsustainable demands on the environment, putting strains on natural resources and processes.

Malta's most significant air pollutants remain particulates and ozone, the concentrations of which exceed EU standards in certain areas. There is a need to assess the key sources of particulate matter, in order to provide an effective policy response. Ozone, which is an air pollutant formed through chemical reactions of primary traffic and power generation emissions, is principally of transboundary origin.

In the area of climate change, Malta needs to sustain efforts towards decoupling of economic activity from greenhouse gas emissions. In this respect, it is important to initiate both supply-side measures, such as investing in a range of cleaner and more efficient energy technologies, including renewables and high-efficiency cogeneration, as well as demand management measures. These would include energy efficiency in buildings and in the transport sector.

The Environment Report also highlights that there is significant potential for improving the overall efficiency of land use in the Maltese Islands, particularly given current over-supply in the residential, commercial and industrial sectors. The potential of using incentives to achieve this merits investigation. In order to reduce wastage and raise efficiency levels of water use, improved water demand management is required. In particular, water pricing needs to be extended to private water supplies, in order to improve demand management over the whole spectrum of water use, with the wider sustainability goals in mind.

In terms of marine areas, the Environment Report states that the next step forward for the protection of the coastal and marine environment is to formulate a national vision for marine areas. This will need to integrate environmental protection with the sustainable use of coastal and marine environments, and take the form of a marine spatial plan, which will build upon the recommendations of various sectoral plans addressing Malta's sea space.

At the same time, in order to meet EU waste management targets, Malta will need to continue to invest mainly in its waste-related regulatory and operational infrastructure, on the basis of new policy instruments, programmes and actions, and to allocate sufficient resources for implementation.

Turning to nature conservation, the Report highlights that 64 percent of habitats and 44 percent of species listed in the Habitats Directive have an inadequate or bad conservation status, while the status of 29 percent of Maltese habitats and 36 percent of Maltese species is still unknown. Stringent measures are required for those species with inadequate or bad conservation status to attain favourable status, while further surveys are needed to assess those with unknown status. In terms of environmental health, the Environment Report notes that since most environmental health issues originate in other sectors, there is need for an augmented inter-sectoral approach to finding and implementing policy solutions.

Concluding, the Environment Report stresses that the environment is a crucial contributor to the Maltese economy: it is directly used to produce at least one-fifth of employment and one-sixth of value added, while also providing amenities for recreation, residence and location of economic activity, and absorbing the by-products of production and consumption. Nevertheless, while Malta has already made significant progress in upgrading its environmental policy capacity, its institutional capacity still needs to improve in terms of human resources and funding, as well as public and private sector investments to upgrade operations and infrastructure.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 2008 Environment Report. This report builds on the tradition of quality environmental reporting found in past editions of the State of the Environment Report in 2005, 2002 and 1998. The 2008 report has been branded to ensure that the tradition of making environmental information ever more accessible to policymakers and the public is kept up, in line with Malta's legal obligations under the Environment Protection Act, and the Aarhus Convention and other related EU Directives.

The Environment Report aims to communicate key environmental issues and trends to policymakers, constituted bodies, government agencies and civil society in a clear and concise way. Its objectives are to increase awareness and understanding among all the stakeholders of key environmental trends, and their causes and consequences, to provide a sound evidence base for improved policy and decision-making at all levels, and to facilitate the effective measurement of environmental performance and progress towards sustainability. The Report is accompanied by a booklet of key environmental indicators, and any readers interested in 'digging down' to find more information and resources will find all the relevant documents including the report, the indicators booklet, educational movie clips, the Sub-reports, background reports, and key datasheets and maps used in the writing of the report, on The Environment Report website www.mepa.org.mt/ter.

As in previous years, the Environment Report covers the entire environment sector. It is the fruit of intense collaboration between the project team and the technical officers at MEPA and within other government agencies and bodies, primarily the National Statistics Office, with which this Report is produced in partnership. The Malta Resources Authority, the Department for Environmental Health, the Malta Standards Authority, WasteServ Malta Ltd, the Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs, the Malta Maritime Authority, and the Malta Tourism Authority, amongst others, have also contributed significantly to the 2008 Report, as have non-governmental bodies such as Birdlife (Malta) and Ekoskola. The Environment Report monitors trends during the period from 2005 to 2008, but since environmental change tends to be long-term, where time series are long enough, data has been presented for 10 years or from 2000.

This year, the Environment Report takes a broader approach to analysing the environment sector, while retaining the basic structure of the Report, which is based upon the pressure-state-response model. Following this model, the Report first discusses the economic and social pressures that drive environmental change, considers the state of key environmental sectors such as air, fresh water, land and biodiversity, before closing with a review of government policy responses to environmental issues. This year, however, the policy sections in each chapter have been fleshed out, to give readers a better understanding of the key policies and legislative instruments in each field. The policy responses chapter is also lengthier, providing a clearer picture of policy actions taken in the review period. A further innovation is the chapter on the relationship between the environment and economic activity, which traces out the different ways the economy and the environment are inter-related, as well as the chapter on environmental health. These two chapters explore more closely how environmental issues impact our daily lives in terms of our health and our economic activities.

I hope you enjoy reading and using the 2008 Environment Report, and augur that it achieves its aim in highlighting the most important environmental trends and issues in a clear, direct and attractive way.



Martin Seychell
Director, Environment Protection Directorate, MEPA



CHAPTER 1

DRIVING FORCES

KEY MESSAGES:

- » Malta's population has largely met its basic material needs. However the way these needs have been transformed into demands is often placing unsustainable strains on natural resources and processes in Malta. Future food and fuel consumption patterns require more consideration in terms of sustainability.
- » The number of vacant properties has continued to rise, with 22.4 percent of all dwellings lying permanently vacant in 2005. Urgent measures, including economic instruments and re-orientation of the construction industry towards rehabilitation, are needed to address this issue in ways that do not place undue pressures on affordability and availability of housing, and take into account social and economic implications.
- » Tourism is an important economic sector in terms of GDP but puts significant pressure on the environment due to additional consumption of resources, increase in waste generation and land take-up for tourism infrastructure. The tourism industry will need to focus on ensuring a quality product that prevents undue pressure on Malta's natural resources such as by attracting more tourists in the shoulder months and penetrating those niche markets that are generally more sensitive and supportive towards conservation.
- » Malta's environmental targets and objectives related to air pollution and climate change can only be met by decoupling its growing total energy demand from economic growth. The Islands remain far from reaching EU renewable energy and energy efficiency targets. In order to reach these targets Malta will need to reduce consumption and develop widespread use of alternative technologies. In this regard, the preparation of plans in the energy sector, on renewable energy

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