

ENGO MANIFESTO

The reforms in planning and environmental policy, far from heralding progress, promote developers' interests at the cost of citizens' rights. In opposition to a reform which privileges the developers, the ENGOs are presenting the following programme of real reform; one which finally protects our heritage, our countryside and our residents. This manifesto will lead to more transparent regulating authorities, empower the public, guarantee public access and secure our health and quality of life. Through this programme, we demand that the common good be respected instead of it continuing to be trampled upon by powerful private interests.

HERITAGE

- MEPA needs to step up its scheduling as many heritage monuments remain unprotected, especially those within the development zone.
- Protection of urban gardens needs to be strengthened by the designation of protected Green Enclaves throughout Malta and Gozo.
- Buffer zones to be scheduled along with the heritage site they are intended to protect.
- Areas of high landscape value are also be scheduled, with no building allowed in these zones.
- MEPA needs to fulfil its duty to ensure that owners of scheduled properties maintain their buildings, otherwise MEPA has the duty to step in, do the repairs and invoice the owners
- The HPU, CHAC and NHAC governance vacuum should be rectified, as MEPA boards are not obliged to follow their recommendations and indeed frequently ignore them.

PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION

- The situation that the public can see but not take copies of MEPA file data violates the public's right to access to information and needs to be rectified.
- The public requires the services of a well-staffed customer care unit dedicated specially to guide the uninitiated through the bewildering morass of MEPA procedures and regulations.
- The Environment Commissioner's governance vacuum should be rectified, as MEPA boards are not obliged to follow their recommendations and indeed frequently ignore them.
- The reports carried out at the initiative of the Environment Commissioner should be made available to the public online, along with those for which plaintiffs give consent.
- NGOs are to be recognised as interested parties in the courts of law.
- MEPA's legal framework still bears a strong bias in favour of developers. Objectors' and NGO rights to equal standing in appeal cases and revocations needs to be established.

- MEPA Board meetings need to be properly documented; as public meetings, the minutes should be uploaded to be available to the public. MEPA's weekly Board meetings behind closed doors are unlawful and as such should stop.

RESPONSIBLE DEVELOPMENT

- New MEPA policies should not be ratified before the new Structure Plan is prepared and thorough studies are carried out to assess the nation's future needs.
- The determination of permits through Case Officers, without being processed by the EPC in public is unlawful and unacceptable.
- The automatic renewal of corrupt or inadequate permits undermines the present system and any hope of reform. Errors of the past will continue to haunt the future.
- MEPA Case Officers often present their cases as if representing the developers' interests. Key issues that negatively impact developers' cases are sometimes omitted.
- The practice that Case Officers do not visit sites before adjudicating applications is irresponsible and needs to be revised for all but minor applications.
- The honouring of site 'commitment' whereby it is presumed that money spent by a developer must be rewarded by the granting of development rights/continuation even when the developer has made only a token investment needs to be killed at MEPA.
- Implementation of a strict code of ethics throughout the Authority and the establishment of a level playing field between developers and the general public.
- While MEPA officials and directors continue to be appointed by politicians, MEPA will continue to serve as a screen, controlled by the Government of the day.
- Citizens right not to be buried under high rise development to be protected.

MINISTRY FOR ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

- Environment Ministry to have veto on planning reforms, new regulations and permits infringing on environmentally sensitive zones.
- The Environment Directorate should not be rendered powerless and should still have the power to scrutinise permits, unlike the present situation where it has lost its voice.
- The draft tree protection law needs to be ratified immediately in order to save trees.
- Until all ministries and authorities are regulated by the values of sustainability this ministry will be working in a vacuum. The new MEPA policies currently being processed are the antithesis of responsible development and render null and void any future Ministry of Sustainability efforts.

OUT OF DEVELOPMENT ZONES

- No redevelopment of existing buildings outside development zone. Buildings could be restored but only when this is done in a way which is sensitive to the surrounding landscape.
- No development of new buildings in ODZ on the pretext of agri-tourism.
- No extensions of existing ODZ residences. In particular, developers who have managed to circumvent environmental regulations and obtain ODZ permits should not now be rewarded with further extensions of their properties.
- No more change of use for ODZ land. Whenever an ODZ permit is awarded, the applicant should not be able to apply for change of use, turning 'stables' or 'wineries' into ODZ villas, for example.
- Effective enforcement action to be taken against high countryside walls exceeding the legal height limit, which are turning countryside lanes into corridors.
- The moratorium on further development zone extensions should be extended indefinitely. After the rationalization exercise conducted in 2006, a 10-year moratorium was declared on further enlargement of the development zone. Using current population projections, there is no need for more ODZ land to be developed for the foreseeable future.
- ODZ zones which have been included in the rationalisation schemes (green areas) should be subject to planning control exercises which guarantee the quality of life of residents and not the interests of developers.

PUBLIC ACCESS

- Implementation of the Public Domain law, including the freeing from private possession of footpaths leading to cultural heritage and areas of environmental beauty or importance.
- Definitive map of the Maltese islands to be published and made accessible to the public, identifying clearly land which is public property.
- Strict control over politicians' ability to dispose of the heritage of Maltese people as if it were their private property.
- Public access to the coast not to be impeded in any way.

AIR POLLUTION

- Effective enforcement should be taken against air pollution from power stations, incinerators, industrial establishments and vehicular traffic.

TRANSPORT

- Efforts to provide reliable, non-polluting road and sea public transport need to be supplemented with alternative solutions which reduce the nation's dependency on private car use.
- Increasing the cycling path network along with ongoing TV educational campaigns to improve road safety would make cycling a viable alternative in Malta.
- Transport Malta needs to gradually introduce the concept of shared spaces that give precedence to pedestrians.
- Widespread improvements to pavements and pedestrian paving are needed in order to allow the mobility-challenged to fully participate in the community as well encouraging exercise as means to improve health and reduce the nation's health expenditure.

STONE

- Supplies of Maltese stone need to be protected as a dwindling resource. Recycling of stone needs to become mandatory, while alternative materials need to be sourced or produced.
- The real value of stone needs to be established based not only on quarrying costs, but on the cost to the environment as well as the cost to the nation's health related to conditions associated with stone-dust pollution.
- No more extensions of existing quarries and rehabilitation of spent quarries.

WATER HARVESTING

- Protection of water resources should be made a priority. Meters are to be installed on all boreholes and proper enforcement should take place. Tariffs on all industrial boreholes are to be introduced. Quotas for farmers should be enforced; amounts in excess of the quotas to be charged at an appropriate tariff to avoid surplus water being sold for unrelated activities.

SOLAR RIGHTS

- Right of citizens to generate clean energy via photovoltaic panels to be protected from high-rise development.