

20TH JUNE 2014

COMMENTS FROM DIN I-ART HELWA TO MEPA ON THE DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (SPED)

1. Din I-Art Helwa maintains that the Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development (SPED) issued by the government for public consultation **is not valid and does not fulfil the expectations** of the strategic spatial plan which is required to guide development and the environment.
2. The document is **out of line with the legal requirements** for the SPED. The Environment and Development Planning Act 2010 states clearly that the Strategic Plan should set out policies and include “an explanatory memorandum giving a reasoned justification for each of the policies and proposals contained in the plans.” (Cap. 504 51c)
3. The document now issued for public consultation does not include the required policies, let alone any reasoned justification for them. Instead it only contains a list of objectives which are very similar to the objectives published in 2012 in preparation for the Strategic Plan. The 2012 document clearly stated that the objectives were only intended to “guide the policy formulation stage of the drawing up of the SPED” (p.24). Din I-Art Helwa is of the opinion that **it is unacceptable for the same objectives to now simply be presented as the full Strategic Plan.**
4. The government is attempting to show that it has fulfilled its environmental obligations by presenting the document it describes as the ‘SPED’ for public consultation, when it has done nothing of the kind. MEPA should **go back to the drawing board** and publish a proper holistic strategy to regulate the sustainable development of land and sea resources as required by the Environment and Planning Development Act 2010.
5. The document does not include adequate spatial plans, policy details or explanatory memoranda that should form an integral part of this document. In removing the key diagrams and planning documents, the replacement of the Local Plans is now reaching the same importance as the SPED and **Din I-Art Helwa requests that both the SPED and the Local Plans that are currently being revised are both approved by the House of Representatives.**
6. The government document ‘For an Efficient Planning System – Revisions to the Environment and Development Planning Act 2010’ (2014) on the proposed MEPA demerger refers to a Spatial Strategy in points 13, 14, 15 (page 4), and proposes that this Strategy should only be approved by the Minister and that it can be reviewed when necessary removing the 5-year constraint in the current law. Din I-Art Helwa disagrees strongly with this point and

maintains that **the Spatial Strategy should be endorsed by the House of Representatives, as is the case in the current legislation for the SPED and as was the case for the Structure Plan, and not by the Minister.** Why is this being changed? This change will weaken the status of the Spatial Strategy and is not acceptable. This is also highlighted by the fact that at the same time the government is proposing that the new National Strategy for the Environment is to be approved by the House of Representatives, arguing that the existing National Policy for the Environment (2012) “without a legal framework to support it remains weak as a directional document (see p.9 of the document ‘Towards High Standards for Environment Protection and Resource Management, 2014). **The 5-year constraint should also be maintained in order to provide some stability.**

7. The SPED recognises the need to contain development. The Environmental Report (SEA) on the SPED stresses the importance of ensuring that the SPED addresses all the current threats which our environment is facing. In particular, it is important to note that the SPED (1.11) binds itself to ensure that there is balance between the *“demands for development with socio-economic considerations and the need to protect the environment.”* The SPED also outlines (2.12-2.14) that there is already an over-supply of dwelling units; “leading to the conclusion that there is an oversupply of land for housing”. Similarly, there may also already be an over-supply of potential office space, especially if brown field sites are considered as part of the equation. This conclusion together with the SEA is a very strong indicator that **the SPED and any subsequent documents should in no way increase the development zones or threaten further the nature of the ODZ.**
8. In the light of the current over-provision of building development, **the SPED should guarantee to the public that NO INCREASE IN THE DEVELOPMENT ZONES WILL BE PERMITTED IN ANY SUBSIDIARY PLANS.**
9. In the light of the long list of threats to biodiversity and associated environmental issues listed in the Environmental Report for the SPED, **ODZ areas require a high level of protection and should be given increased importance in the SPED document.**