



PRIME MINISTER
AUBERGE DE CASTILLE, VALLETTA, MALTA

17 November 2014

Ms Simone Mizzi
Executive President Din l-Art Helwa
133,
Melita Street
Valletta
VLT 1123

Dear Ms Mizzi,

I refer to your open letter of the 31st October 2014 about the state of the environment and Government's plans for the future.

Let me state from the outset that I am not one to shy away from pushing ahead further economic and social reforms which create stronger growth and wealth for our country. It is, I believe, a gross misconception to assume that wealth can only be achieved at the expense of our environment.

Your opening remark mentions that good planning is vital. Government could not agree more. Since March 2013 it has embarked on an extensive programme aimed at bringing up to date the development planning framework which has stagnated since 2006. Some suggested that Government should address planning reforms at a slower pace. The country cannot wait.

Your second point which merits response is that environmental safeguards between 1992 and 2012 are now being dismantled. This claim is not supported by any factual evidence. To the contrary, the National Environmental Policy adopted in 2012 is still in place and its implementation continuously monitored.

In your letter you also repeat remarks regarding the format and content of the Strategic Plan for Environment and Development. In contrast to your claim, Malta has not been left without a proper strategy for the future governance and good administration of its built and rural environment since the Structure Plan and Local Plans approved in 1992 and 2006 are still in place and will remain in place until specifically repealed.

SPED is a holistic plan which gives importance to environment. The SPED not only integrates the environment with socio-economic development but a full SEA carried out on the Plan identified the need for a stronger implementation of existing mechanisms particularly through co-ordination at Government level of the policy development and policy implementation process. This plan is not meant to be a stand-alone document to be implemented in isolation.



SPED is a strategic planning document aimed at guiding spatial allocation for development required for socio-economic growth through sustainable use of land and sea. Environmental protection is regulated through an extensive regulatory framework that is already in place. The SPED is a complementary document to this environmental regulatory framework.

The Strategic Plan will be debated and approved by Parliament and there is no intention to amend the legislation to enable approval by the Minister alone.

You also make reference to the rural policy, the policy for high rise buildings and the calls for expression of interest for land reclamation.

The Rural Policy is a consolidation of three separate planning policies into one document with some minor changes supported by the necessary environmental safeguards. The environmental impact of these changes was considered to be insignificant during the SEA screening process which was carried out in accordance with the Strategic Environment Assessment Regulations.

The inclusion of the Mriehel site in the policy for high rise buildings followed the existing procedure for public consultation as set out in the legislation.

The comments on land reclamation are incorrect and gratuitous. Government has long committed itself publicly that apart from professional cost benefit analyses that include due diligence, any pre-selected projects will be subjected to the most rigorous environmental studies and assessments.

Planning reform was one of the major platforms on which the Government was elected in 2013 with the fundamental goal of working towards sustainability through a balance between social, economic and environmental objectives.

These initial steps will result in the long term legacy for Malta's sustainability in the future.

Joseph Muscat
Prime Minister