

The Executive Chairperson
Planning Authority
St. Francis Ravelin,
Floriana

Date: 21 February 2022
ERA Ref: EA 00028/19

Dear Sir/Madam,

Planning Ref.: PA 02943/19
Description Proposal: It is proposed to demolish existing Hotel, Excavate and Construct a new Class 3B Hotel having 400 Rooms, class 3C Gym, class 3D Diving Centre & water sports facilities, class 4B Retail outlets, class 4D bars, class 4D Restaurants & ancillary facilities including an indoor and an outdoor pool, parking area plus multipurpose halls.
Location: Site at, Ramla Bay Resort, Triq ir-Ramla tal-Bir, Marfa, Mellieħa

Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (S.L. 549.46)
Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Protection Regulations (S.L. 549.44)

ERA's report on the said development proposal are being lodged in its capacity as an external consultee and an interested party in accordance with the Development Planning Act and the Development Planning (Procedure for Applications and their Determination) Regulations (S.L. 552.13).

Reference is made to the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) Reports submitted as part of the proposal in caption. Attached to this correspondence please find:

- Annex I: Summary of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) Reports; and,
- Annex II: ERA Conditions (to be applied once the ensuing revised proposal is duly submitted to ERA's satisfaction).

Case Background

The proposal is for the second phase of the redevelopment of the Ramla Bay Hotel at Marfa, and follows an earlier partial redevelopment of the seaward part of the resort, which at the time was subject to an Appropriate Assessment and an Ecological Survey in 2015/2016.

The currently proposed Phase 2 has been assessed by ERA through the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. Such EIA was requested following screening in accordance with the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (S.L. 549.46), specifically Schedule I, Category I, Section 7.1.1.1 (*Construction or extension of hotels, holiday complexes, holiday villages, hostels, accommodation facilities, homes for the elderly, hospitals, or associated development, if located wholly or partly outside development zones and having: (i) a capacity of 250 beds or more; or (ii) a gross floor area of 10,000m² or more; or a site area of 2.5 ha or more*).

The proposal (Phase 2) was also assessed by ERA through an Appropriate Assessment (AA) following screening in accordance with the Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Regulations (S.L. 549.44) in view of its location within the area of influence of the following Natura 2000 sites:

- (i) *Żona fil-Baħar ta' madwar Għawdex* (MT 0000112) designated as an Special Protected Area (SPA) via Government Notice 1311 of 2016;
- (ii) *Kemmuna u l-Gżejjer ta' Madwarha* (MT 0000017) designated as an SPA via GN 1311 of 2016; and
- (iii) *L-Inħawi tar-Ramla tat-Torri u tal-Irdum tal-Madonna* (MT 0000009) designated as an SPA via GN 112 of 2007.

The EIA and AA along with all the relevant documentation can be accessed from the ERA website (Ref: EA 00028/19), through the following link: <https://era.org.mt/era-project/pa02943-19/>.

Overview of the Outcomes of the EIA and AA Reports

The EIA consultants identified significant residual impacts on visual amenity and geology (due to extraction of resources and features), whilst noting that the significance of other residual impacts identified (broadly relating to hydrology, terrestrial ecology, cultural heritage and landscape character) depends largely on the thorough implementation of pre-emptive safeguards and mitigation measures. In conclusion, the below *moderate to major adverse* residual impacts are still likely to be present after all mitigation measures have been exhausted:

- (i) A *major* adverse residual impact is envisaged due to the extraction of natural bedrock;
- (ii) A *moderate* adverse residual impact is envisaged on the Local Landscape Tract (LLT) identified as predominantly developed coast of high sensitivity whilst *major* adverse residual impacts are expected from viewpoints 1-5 due to a significant change to the overall panoramic views and the increased dominance of the building.

The scope of the consultant's AA report was more limited, in view of the focused remit of the AA mechanism. The consultants did not identify any significant impacts related to avifauna as long as the proposed good environmental practices and mitigation measures to effectively control and limit light pollution are duly implemented. The consultants concluded that, following a detailed evaluation of the anticipated impacts and their potential mitigation, the proposal and associated works are not expected to adversely affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites for which this assessment was undertaken.

ERA's Assessment and Recommendations

After its assessment of the proposal, also taking into account the consultants' evaluation, the ERA does not object to this proposal, but notes that there are outstanding considerations which need to be addressed. In this regard, ERA requests that:

- (i) Improved attention is given to minimisation of dominance of the building, especially as perceived from panoramic viewpoints (including the Ćirkewwa main road i.e. viewpoint 8, where the impact is considered more than *minor adverse*);
- (ii) The Alang Alang building located on the shore is reduced in height;
- (iii) Development is to be contained within the site boundary, avoiding/removing structures/encroachment onto adjacent rural land; and
- (iv) The area east of the hotel (including garigue and rocky coast) is to be restored. In this regard, the ERA is requesting a Restoration Method Statement (RMS).

This no objection is subject to the aforementioned conditionalities being addressed to ERA's satisfaction. Once the conditionalities listed above have been addressed, the ensuing revised proposal can be considered favourably subject to more detailed conditions as attached in Annex II.

Yours faithfully,

Ryan Busuttil
Environment Protection Officer
f/Director Environment and Resources

Disclaimer

The above comments are being issued without prejudice to any additional issues which are regulated by ERA through any relevant environmental permitting and, or compliance mechanisms, as well as to any environmental considerations that may be beyond the scope of the application under consideration.

The above assessment is based on the information provided to ERA in the application. Should it result that such information is incorrect, incomplete or misleading, or in the event of any omissions, or subsequent modifications, amendments or changes to the proposal, application and/or related submissions, the above assessment (including any favourable consideration, lack of objection, any proposed conditions or lack thereof, or any other equivalent stance, etc.) may need to be reopened to ERA's satisfaction. ERA shall not take responsibility for comments, assessments or judgments based on information that is incorrect, incomplete, missing or misleading, and which is only discovered after its assessment, nor for any environmental impacts resulting from developments which it was not specifically consulted on. Furthermore, ERA also retains the right to take additional action should the information provided, or any incorrect, incomplete, missing or misleading details, be tantamount to fraud.