

MEPA's comments on the SEA scoping report on Malta's Rural Development Programme for the period 2014-2020.

June 2014

1. Introduction

- 1.1 MEPA notes that an SEA will be carried out for Malta's Rural Development Programme (2014-2020), in line with the Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations of 2010¹. Our comments on the SEA Scoping Report are provided below and we look forward to be consulted on the SEA Environmental Report. We are also attaching a copy of the EPD's previous comments in relation to the 5 themes that are being considered for inclusion in the RDP 2014-2020 (appendix 1 below). These comments were submitted to the Agricultural Department in 2013. It is recommended that these comments are taken into consideration in the drafting of the new Malta's Rural Development Programme (2014-2020) and the SEA Environmental Report.
- 1.2 The scoping report provides a good overview of the scope and parameters for the environment assessment of the Programme and preparation of the SEA Environmental Report. However, the following issues should also be addressed in the following stages of the SEA process.

2. General comments

- 2.1 The Environmental Report is an important step in the SEA process to ensure that all significant environmental impacts are addressed.
- 2.2 Reference to MEPA should be amended in view of the upcoming separation of the environmental and planning functions of MEPA into two new authorities.
- 2.3 EPD has a direct interest in the emerging programme in view of the strong interactions between agriculture, rural development and the environmental qualities of the countryside. Any future on-the-ground interventions and land use commitments emerging from, or connected to, the implementation of this Programme will require project-level environmental evaluation once more tangible proposals are available. Depending on the nature, scale and location of the individual developments, this may also include an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and/or an Appropriate Assessment in line with the EIA Regulations of 2007 and the Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Protection Regulations of 2006.

3. Malta Rural Development Programme 2014- 2020

- 3.1 In point 8 it is understood that the Plan has already been drafted. This should be made clear in the scoping report as well as in the environment report.

¹ Legal Notice 497 of 2010

- 3.2 MEPA notes that the identified six EU-wide (EAFRD) priorities for rural development together with the five themes are aimed specifically to facilitate the implementation of the rural development priorities at a national level. However, it may be the case where certain priorities could have major adverse environmental impacts. For example concessions for other unsustainable practices (e.g. scattered non-agricultural development, urbanisation) in rural areas may actually undermine the agricultural sector even where initially intended to support rural diversification. The SEA needs to consider, in detail, the potential implications including the risk of promoting abusive or speculative development in the countryside and the additional risk of widespread land abandonment and dereliction as continued cultivation becomes less attractive than conversion of the land to other urban-type uses.
- 3.2 Against the above background it is important that the plan also considers other important aspects and therefore it is recommended that the following considerations should also be taken into account in the environmental report whilst conducting the RDP Assessment :
- Prevention of further urban sprawl at the expense of open/undeveloped countryside;
 - Avoidance of new development commitments/pressures scattered in the countryside;
 - Protection of other important aspects of the natural/rural environment (e.g. site topography, natural physical features, valleys, natural water catchments, cliffs, etc);
 - Preventing adverse environmental impact that may arise from indirect and consequential implications of development - e.g. impacts associated with overcoming of unfavourable topography, opening or widening of access, introducing ancillary infrastructure (e.g. utility services, drainage systems), accommodating foreseeable operational demands (e.g. parking), etc.

4. Baseline Data

- 4.1 Reference to the marine environment is only made in terms of biodiversity. Marine water quality is very much influenced by agricultural practices (either by runoff or by the disposal of animal waste in the sewerage network). In our opinion the water quality of the marine environment should also be considered as an essential environmental parameter. Thus it is recommended that the environmental baseline should also consider:
- nitrate quality in coastal waters that are vulnerable to contamination from predominantly agricultural hydrological sub-catchments;
 - pesticides in the water environment; and
 - incidents related to the failure to comply with the Urban Waste Water Directive thresholds due to discharge of animal waste in the sewerage network.

The WFD objectives and thresholds identified for groundwaters should also apply for coastal waters and inland surface waters particularly where the Nitrates Directive and Urban Waste Water Directive set thresholds have been exceeded.

5. SEA Objectives

- 5.1 The SEA objectives need to be updated to reflect the potential impacts that the Rural Development Programme may have on the coastal water environment including those aspects mentioned above in Section 4. Similarly these aspects should be reflected and considered in the 'likely effects and constraints' chapter.

6. Analysis of Related Plans, Programmes, and Legislation

- 6.1 MEPA recommends that the following relevant Directives, National Plans and reports should also be taken into consideration:
- Rural Development Plan (including agri-environment measures and Good Farming Practices);
 - Code of Good Agricultural Practices;
 - Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC);
 - Nitrates Directive and the Nitrates Action Plan;
 - Urban Waste Water Directive;
 - cross-compliance mechanism; and
 - veterinary and animal welfare standards.
- 6.2 With regards to SPED, it important to note that the date of publication should read 2014 not 2012. The scoping report should also outline that an SEA has been undertaken for the SPED.

Appendix 1

EPD Comments on the Rural Development Programme for Malta 2014-2020

Introduction

1. EPD supports this initiative and welcomes the opportunity to submit comments to guide the forthcoming Rural Development Programme (RDP) for Malta 2014-2020. EPD's comments concern the five measures around which the new programme will be organised, namely:

1. Water, waste and energy
2. Maltese quality produce
3. Sustainable livestock
4. Landscape and environment
5. Wider rural economy and quality of life

In providing these comments, EPD has attempted to avoid restricting or narrowing the scope of the RDP, to ensure that actions which may be proposed at a later stage during the 7-year programme are not excluded at inception stage. Notwithstanding this, EPD would strongly advise that Actions developed under this programme should be discussed further with MEPA, for its views on the associated environmental impact and effectiveness of each action from an environmental perspective.

Strategic Comments

2. EPD notes that the 5 measures above are **broad enough in scope to encompass and fund agro-environmental actions targeting priority environmental issues for Malta**; as identified in various 'State of the Environment' Reports² and the National Environment Policy³. More specifically, these proposed actions place a focus on agro-environmental issues which may fall under RDP Measure 1 – Water, waste and energy, Measure 4 - Landscape and environment and Measure 5 - Wider rural economy and quality of life.
3. EPD would like to emphasise that **experiences concerning the successes and failures of Agri-Env Measures (AEMs)** gained over the past and current programming should be drawn upon to shape the new plan. Ex-post evaluations of the past and current RDP are hence of assistance here. However of further guidance are the documents provided by the European Commission's Working Group on Agriculture and Biodiversity (all documents are available on the CIRCA BC website Agriculture Department contact point, Mr Alan Agius); to design measures that benefit the agricultural sector, while targeting the most relevant issues of biodiversity. Reports drafted under this WG identify:
 - Criteria for defining good examples of measures which have proven to be effective for enhancing biodiversity and benefitting agriculture;

² <http://www.mepa.org.mt/terintro>

³ <https://secure2.gov.mt/tsdu/environment-nep?l=1>

- Methods that may be applied to increase uptake and ensure continuity of action i.e. developing AEMs that are simple and attractive/accessible to the farmer, reasonably close to average farming practice, easy to explain to the farmer and to be understood by the farmer, can be linked to training/advice, rewarded by a fair compensation, are multifunctional/provide various benefits, and bearing in mind the degree of effort required by the farmer to comply and execute that measure, the administrative effort to evaluate the effectiveness of that measures as well as the benefits accrued not only to biodiversity but also to the farmer;
 - Methods that increase efficiency of action of clearly formulated well defined objectives that are cost-effective and possibly specific to a certain species, habitat or practice. Further guidance is available from the catalogue of most effective biodiversity-AEMs (deliverable 1D) and from the outputs of deliverable 1E on facilitating the collaboration among farmers to achieve cooperative mechanisms to protect biodiversity and that could be included in the rural development programmes
 - methods of how the contribution/effectiveness of a particular AEM towards biodiversity and Natura 2000 will be measured;
4. EPD is taking this opportunity to remind that implementation of actions which may have a potential impact on the environment should be screened and assessed by EPD prior to commitment. It is for the benefit of both entities if all actions are developed in such a way as to facilitate monitoring and measuring of effectiveness and timeliness. Of main concern to the EPD is the **proliferation of development in ODZ**. EPD strongly cautions against the creation of an RDP that directly or indirectly encourages such proliferation. Actions that discourage the proliferation of ODZ developments should also be factored into the new RDP, possibly tied to a set of funding conditions.
5. From a Biodiversity perspective, the development of the RDP 2014-2020 should also be informed by the requirements of:
- The [EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020](#) in particular Target 3a and Actions 9 to 10, as well as the linkages with Targets 1 and 2.
 - [Malta's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2012-2020 \(NBSAP\)](#) in particular but not limited to Targets 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13 and 17, and Relevant Measures (See Appendix I)
6. Against this background, EPD is recommending that the **input which was provided in 2006** (see Appendix II), **should also guide the upcoming 2014-2020 plan**. EPD input concerned incentives to reward and financially support Land Managers with an appropriate premium for the following actions, when carried out according to specific conditions arising out of regulating entities, including:
- Maintaining and safeguarding existing ecosystems and associated ecosystem services, natural habitats, natural features (including those that serve as natural components of green infrastructure) and habitats of wild indigenous species, including indigenous trees.
 - Facilitating maintenance of traditional farmland in protected areas and high nature value farmland areas while preventing overexploitation and damage to environmental media, and to components of biodiversity.

- Facilitating appropriate management and maintenance of existing orchards of local tree varieties to protect and maintain the local autochthonous agricultural biodiversity in danger of extinction.
- Preserving local animal breeds and farm animal genetic resources (AnGR) to maintain, conserve and characterise the local autochthonous animal genetic resources in danger of extinction. The same applies for plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA)
- Supporting organic and traditional agriculture which are more environmentally friendly; leading to a reduction in the application of fertilizers and pesticides, a reduction in water demand, an improvement in soil quality, the protection/enhancement of the local biodiversity, and less take up of land.
- Promoting the adaptation or cessation of particularly harmful or inefficient land management and/or farming practices to reduce risks of damage to features of cultural value
- Restoration, enhancement and creation of natural habitats and planting of indigenous trees and shrubs (where deemed required and of added value to natural regeneration) to increase biodiversity and landscape value of rural areas through investments for site management projects and to deploy elements of green infrastructure. (This would also contribute to the EU target on restoration in the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 and also bearing in mind the Communication on Green Infrastructure – Enhancing Europe’s Natural Capital)
- Establishing projects for the propagation of genetic resources of local agricultural species/varieties and/or conservation of farm animal genetic resources (AnGR) to protect and maintain the gene pool of wild genetic resources or landraces and local autochthonous agricultural species/cultivars/strains/varieties.
- Restoration of cultural heritage, including traditional rural features and existing country pathways to conserve and enhance cultural heritage, the traditional rural character and traditional rural landscape features.
- Establishing environmental and cultural awareness projects to increase environmental and cultural awareness amongst the general public and the farming community.
- Promote the sale and marketing of traditional products derived from local agricultural varieties including traditional crafts related to agriculture, with the aim of promoting Maltese traditional crafts and produce of local indigenous agricultural varieties, improving their presentation and marketing.

Measure-specific comments

7. In addition, **EPD is also putting forward the following proposals to inform future Actions**, organised by Measure:

7.1 Measure 1 - Water, waste and energy

- This measure allows for funding of actions addressing **more efficient water management and water-related environmental issues**; such as of pesticide and fertiliser use. Actions should aim to have a positive impact on natural watercourses beyond their scope for water harvesting and be in line with the Water Framework Directive and with the Habitats Directive. These Directives aim to support specific and fragile ecosystems, including water courses which may also happen to fall within Natura

- 2000 sites. These actions could also serve as a basis for, or be implemented with stricter thresholds when promoting areas under organic farming.
- **Actions targeting appropriate waste management at farm level** are being proposed both as a stand alone funded action, and as one which should result in extended positive impacts on the quality of water and air in agricultural areas. It is opportune to mention that **agricultural funding proposals that require environment-related permits**, including a waste management plan, **would benefit from supporting actions providing technical assistance and guidance at application screening stage**. The ultimate outcome of such an action should result in a more efficient, less drawn out assessment timeframe, thereby increasing the chances of obtaining funds available. From a strategic point of view, such funded assistance could better feature under the proposed new Measure 6 – Technical Assistance (see 3.4).
 - Although not directly referred to in the theme title, this measure should also encompass **soil management, with efforts intended to preventing further land degradation and ensure biomass production, storage, filtration and transformation of substances including water, carbon and nitrogen, through this complex, mutable, living resource**. Actions in this regard should reduce contamination, water, wind and tillage-induced erosion, organic matter decline conditions and desertification threats, and should be in line with Soil Framework Directive aims, while also promoting conservation and/or restoration. It is pertinent to recall that schemes primarily targeting the preservation of water, biodiversity (both above and within the surface of the soil) or landscape heritage may be launched through the adoption of soil conservation practices.

7.2 Measure 4 – Landscape, [soil health] and environment

- This measure allows for **funding of priorities directly relevant to the environmental stewardship including** natural handicap payments, and encompassing the management of Natura 2000 sites and HNVs, as well as promoting actions with resource efficiency outputs and low-carbon activities. This measure should also be extended to encompass soil health, hence the suggested renaming.
- There is scope for **fostering a strong working relationship between EPD and the Agricultural Department and the Managing Authority** for the benefit of this measure. One way in which EPD may contribute to this measure is with information being currently gathered as part of the development of management plans for Natura 2000 sites. Actions and programmes could thereby target those areas in most urgent need of stewardship/management. The following sources should also provide similar guidance:
- Documents of guidance available may inform this Measure, including Deliverable 1b of the European Commission’s Working Group on Agriculture and Biodiversity, concerned with setting the level of ambition and the quantification of targets set in terms of number of physical hectares on which an action for biodiversity, water and soil is planned, compared to the total number of hectares of agricultural land or forestry land. To note is that the level of ambition for Malta from a biodiversity perspective is indicated by the quantified national targets 11 and 13 on species and habitats of Community importance respectively as adopted by Malta’s NBSAP, i.e. 30% of the species of European Community Importance in the Maltese territory having a favourable or improved conservation status and 20% of the habitats of European Community Importance in the Maltese territory having a favourable or improved conservation status by 2020. This target can be **adapted as an action under the RDP focusing on species and habitats that are linked to farming activities**. In the case of habitats, the report of Poláková et al (2011), entitled

Addressing biodiversity and habitat preservation through Measures applied under the Common Agricultural Policy, provides a broad field-scale typology (would need to be adapted to Malta) of agricultural habitats linking farming practices and biodiversity in the EU. This document addresses biodiversity and habitat preservation through measures applied under the Common Agricultural Policy. In this manner, actions (see list of examples in Appendix III) under the RDP would dovetail with the NBSAP, more specifically with Target 7 which requires that by 2020, areas under agriculture are managed sustainably, ensuring the conservation of biodiversity.

- Actions leading to the **degradation, destruction or impoverishment** (e.g. through site formalisation, hard-surfacing of rural tracks, removal of vegetation & over-maintenance, artificialisation, replacement of rubble walls with other structures, land reclamation, habitat clearing, etc.) **need to be avoided**, and the RDP has an important role in diverting resources in the right direction – through both regulatory and economic instruments.
- Actions aimed towards **no-tillage or reduced tillage, in combination with permanent soil cover** (introduction and maintenance of cover crops, crop residues) and crop rotation would also ensure conservation agriculture with a reduction of pathogen built-up and pests.

7.3 Measure 5 - Wider rural economy and quality of life

- This measure allows for **sensitizing economic revenue arising from rural activities with environmental issues**, which is directly related to quality of life.
- Actions under this measure should **target extent of access to the countryside**, as identified in the NEP. Action outputs could include the rationalisation of paths, re-vegetating unused ones, and limiting the surfacing of others making use of suitable materials and only after ensuring that these outputs do not lead to associated environmental impacts from path widening and formalisation of paths as well as installation of ancillary facilities (e.g. urban-type benches).
- **Schemes providing for establishing branding, marketing and certification of products originating from certain important natural habitats** could be incentivized, as these also promote the protection of that same habitat. Examples include garrigue honey and ‘gulepp’ produced from carob maquis. Such actions provide for a valorisation of garigue and maquis, which are incorrectly perceived as having zero economic value. It is however, imperative that such actions should not lead to the proliferation of new built structures in the countryside.
- The schemes above should be developed alongside, but complimentary to **an organic agriculture scheme within NATURA 2000 sites**; allowing for branding, marketing and certification, and possibly also extended to the creation of an organic farmers market.
- Although it may not seem immediately relevant, the **maintenance and environmental restoration of arable agricultural land could also contribute to reducing the loss of soil** after torrential rain. Actions under this measure should not only focus on the appropriate restoration/rehabilitation of rubble walls according to relevant environmental and landscape-friendly specifications, but also through the construction activities eg gutters and water reservoirs, developed with caution and without being exploited to produce environmentally-inconsiderate interventions.
- Other measures intended to reduce soil losses may include: i) Actions to address **restoration of soil nutrient quality and holding capacity** within (but not limited to) registered field parcels (to increase soil fertility and water infiltration rates); ii)

Others to **prevent compaction by agriculture machinery**; iii) Actions aimed towards **replenishment of organic matter** which favours habitats for beneficial microorganisms and insects (to increase soil's natural ability to control diseases and pest outbreaks and to safeguard plant protection efforts supporting the provision of food); 4) Others to introduce incentives for outputs that **reduce off-site impacts** (e.g. sediment deposition, unwarranted eutrophication when water quality deteriorates through excess nutrients deposited during a flooding event); etc.

7.4 Measure 6 - Technical Assistance (*additional*)

- This measure is being proposed as **an additional measure** to the existing 5 RDP measures. The ultimate outcome of **actions under this measure should result in a more efficient, less drawn out application assessment timeframe; thereby increasing the chances of the agriculture community in tapping funds available.** From a strategic point of view, such funded assistance could better feature as a measure in its own right and should be structured in such a manner as to address criticism raised by the farming community during the consultation phase. The core function of actions developed under this measure should aim to provide support to farmers which would increase the success of securing sufficient funds.
 - It is imperative that the implementation of actions, which may have a potential impact on the environment, should be screened, assessed and cleared by EPD prior to any commitments. This may require the development of method statements concerning the implementation of specific actions in order to avoid environmental deterioration. Actions under this measure could thereby **target funding of consultation fees and foster co-ordination between farmers and consultants.**
8. Notwithstanding that EPD structured comments for this document under Measures 1, 4, 5 and 6, it is important to state that **all measures being proposed under the RPD also have the potential of creating indirect benefits for the environment.**

Conclusion

9. The RDP 2014-2020 provides scope to strengthen the relationship between the EPD, the Agriculture Department and the Managing Authority; as mutual consultation should provide for disbursement of RDP funds that benefit the Agricultural sector while enhancing natural environment quality and preventing its medium to long-term deterioration.
10. Thereby, it is important that the strategy for Rural Development 2014-2020 continues to recognize and address:
- the impact of agricultural intensification on the environment with the need to avoid short-sighted commitments that achieve short-term convenience at the expense of wider repercussions in terms of conflicts with the surrounding environment and landscape as well as in terms of opening the rural environment to indirect, cumulative or even synergistic impacts (e.g. consequential infrastructural demands, attraction of further development pressures, increased vehicular access, shifting of demographic patterns with vicious-cycle urbanizing effects, conversion of agricultural facilities into

other developments such that both the rural environment and bona fide agricultural activity are displaced, etc.)

- the potential for environmental stewardship in the farming community and the wider economy stakeholders;, coupled with the need to avoid blanket approaches which disregard the specific environmental considerations, physical constraints and challenges relating to different site contexts and related factors (including topographical, geomorphological, ecological, hydrological, and landscape aspects)
- the influence of socio-environmental threats such as land abandonment, land fragmentation, loss of rubble walls, agricultural land reclamation, reduction of soil health, lack of appropriate access to the countryside, site formalization, topographical engineering, urbanization of the countryside, proliferation of built structures, and the inappropriate design of rural buildings, amongst others

11. It is being emphasized that **implementation of actions, which may have a potential impact on the environment, should be executed only following prior consultation with the EPD** Such actions should only be funded if prior clearance from EPD is obtained.
12. Having an EPD representative assisting in the evaluation of applications for funds should prevent the RDP funding actions which may be environmentally harmful or incompatible with the rural landscape and its habitats. It is therefore being strongly advocated that the **EPD should be represented on the relevant evaluation committee.**
13. EPD would also like to clarify that a number of other Agri-Environment issues that were raised at the meeting held at Hexagon House on 11th September 2013, will be **discussed further with the Agriculture Department** following advice provided by Rural Development/ Managing Authority and Paying Agency representatives, for consideration under the Agriculture Policy.

Based on the above, the Agri-environment actions in this document are being submitted to further address and foster output which respects the delicate relationship between resource-efficient agricultural practices and the environment, while benefitting both.

NBSAP Measures of particular relevance to the RDP review

GR1: Distinct plant and animal genetic resources for food and agriculture (i.e. local livestock breeds and crop varieties, as well as wild relatives/landraces) are conserved as a genetic insurance in the face of environmental and climate risks as well as for food security. This is mainly achieved via the uptake of appropriate agri-environmental measures to support genetic diversity in agriculture.

SH2: Species and Habitats of European Community and National Importance are maintained across their natural range via the implementation of adequate conservation measures, which support the existing legal protection regime. Maintenance or improvement in the status of Maltese species and habitats of European Community Importance, when compared to current assessments, is achieved by 2020, in so far as feasible.

EN2: Conservation objectives and management plans are defined (by 2014 for terrestrial areas [\[11\]](#)) and implemented in a timely manner for Natura 2000 sites, which are also supported by sectoral policies and planning instruments that allow a fully integrated ecosystem approach.

EN3: The capacity of linear features in the landscape (such as dry stone walls, watercourses, field margins, vegetated road verges) to serve as ecological corridors between fragmented areas and protected areas and for maintaining their vital role as important microhabitats for wild species and their dispersal, is maintained, more so in the face of climate change.

EN4: Components for building a green infrastructure (as a holistic framework for resource planning and conservation) are strengthened to improve the ecological coherence of Natura 2000, via integration into the broader landscape, and hence to curb habitat fragmentation, improve adaptation to climate change and aid in integrated flood management.

NR1: High Nature Value Farmland (HNVF) in Malta is mapped according to defined criteria, and good agricultural and low-intensive practices, including organic farming, are applied to preserve such land and associated agrobiodiversity.

NR2: Land uses are commensurate with the management of soil and by inference, water resources across the Maltese Islands. This is required in order to promote: the build-up of soil organic matter; the enhancement of soil biodiversity; the reduction (and reversal, where possible) of soil erosion, contamination and compaction; the minimisation of salinization/sodification levels (where applicable); the mitigation of flood-induced soil mass displacement/ land sliding; and the increase in infiltration and moisture retention.

in the soil. Measures incorporated in a soil action plan are formulated to address these goals in terms of how to mitigate the threats to Maltese soils and adopt measures aimed at soil conservation. The soil action plan and other national relevant policies shall contribute towards the requirements of the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) to develop desertification national action programmes.

NR3: Transposition and implementation of the Pesticides Framework Directive (2009/128/EC), which advocates the sustainable use of pesticides and integrated pest management, , assists in reducing the potential damage on biological and water resources caused by pesticides. This is supported by the development of a national action plan.

NR4: Effective measures are in place and implemented to address the over-abstraction and pollution of groundwaters, namely by nitrates and chlorides, in line with the Groundwater Directive (2006/118/EC), the Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC), the Dangerous Substances Directive (76/464/EEC), transposing national legislation, the National Water Policy for the Future, and the Water Catchment Management Plan for Malta.

CC4: Forestation for climate change mitigation is carried out on land of low biodiversity value or ecosystems largely composed of non-native species (following appropriate removal of invasive species using established guidelines), and preferably degraded ones, and taking into account of the Pan-European Guidelines for Afforestation and Reforestation. Ecologically-sensitive forestation schemes, strategically located within the landscape, also enhance habitat connectivity.

FB2: Market-based instruments (such as economic incentives, fiscal instruments, environmental certification schemes, labelling/branding and green public procurement) that have the potential to support the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, as well as improve the sustainability of supply chains, are explored, and where feasible, established and implemented. Moreover instruments/standards that recognise the value of goods of production systems that sustain biodiversity and the diversification of niche markets at a local level are also identified and fostered, including for those goods and services produced by protected areas.

PC2: The positive and active role of Maltese farmers as stewards of agrobiodiversity and in the maintenance of the countryside and rural environment is encouraged.

PC3: Outreach to farming, fisheries and aquaculture cooperatives, as well as hunting associations, helps to foster new partnerships and new projects or other collaborative work in support of biodiversity.

CB1: National authorities responsible for overseeing the sustainable use of resources (environment, agriculture, fisheries and water) and, for the

regulation of species trade and the movement of non-native species, are well-equipped with adequate human, financial and technical means. An enabling environment is created that allows for effective conservation of biological resources, by way of capacity building including via training and continued professional development; reviewing administrative structures, where required; adopting mechanisms for adequate support in line with the CBD Resource Mobilisation Strategy, where relevant; and via a flexible and adaptable framework which promotes inter-sectoral planning, cooperation and synergy.

SI2: Emerging biodiversity goals are integrated into future national Rural Development Plans, tailoring action to national and local needs whilst still maintaining an economically viable agricultural activity built on sustainable production.

SI3: Farmers receiving financial assistance under the Common Agricultural Policy are compliant with Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAECs) and Statutory Management Requirements (SMR) in line with EU and national legislation.

Appendix II

Proposed Article 39 (Agri-environment) and Article 57 Measures for inclusion in the emerging Rural Development Plan for Malta 2007 – 2013

MEPA

September 2006

This document is presented in three Parts, as follows:

- **Part A:** Proposed Article 39 Measures;
- **Part B:** Proposed Article 57 Measures; and
- **Part C:** Proposed measure for inclusion under Priority Axis 1.

Parts A and B set out a number of proposed measures: 6 measures under Article 39 and another 4 measures under Article 57. Part C proposes a measure on 'Sale and marketing of traditional agricultural products and crafts' for inclusion under Priority Axis 1.

Each proposed measure is structured as follows:

- Description of the measure;
- Objectives;
- Beneficiaries;
- Conditions; and
- Premium

A general condition for all rural development measures:

Given that the problem of illegal boreholes is quite prominent in Malta, the Twinning Experts advised us to include a general condition – applicable to all measures – to deal with this particular issue. ***The proposed condition:*** 'There should be no presence of illegal boreholes'.

A. ARTICLE 39 MEASURES

- 1. Maintaining and safeguarding existing natural habitats, underground life forms, natural features and habitats of wild indigenous species, including indigenous trees**

1.1 Description of measure:

Support will be provided to farmers and land managers for maintaining and protecting existing indigenous trees, natural habitats, wild indigenous species and/or natural features within their land holdings.

Indigenous species are described as species which have long been present in the Maltese Islands and as a result evolved and adapted themselves to the local conditions and thus form an integral part of the Maltese ecosystem.

Natural habitats are distinguished by geographic, abiotic and biotic features, whether entirely natural or semi-natural and whether these are above ground or within the soil ecosystem (below ground). The main natural habitat types include: woodland, maquis, garigue, rocky steppe, clay slopes, freshwater rock pools, watercourses, sand dunes and marshlands.

Natural features include sites of geological (e.g. rock formations); palaeontological (e.g. fossil deposits, fossil-bearing-rock faces, quaternary deposits); geomorphological (landforms/natural sculptures, e.g. watercourses, caves/caverns); or hydrological (e.g. streams, springs, natural pools) interest.

1.2 Objectives:

To protect natural habitats, features of scientific importance and biodiversity on rural land holdings.

1.3 Beneficiaries:

Land managers and farmers.

1.4 Conditions:

- No physical interventions should be carried out on/within natural habitats, soil biome, habitats of wild species and other natural features, including trees/shrubs, unless otherwise requested or approved by MEPA.
- No alteration of or damage to the traditional characteristics of the site, its landform and topography.
- No enclosure of habitats/features should take place.
- No trapping/hunting activity should take place within natural habitats.
- No fixing of objects to trees/shrubs should take place.
- No dumping or discharge of any liquids, substances or poison within/on natural habitats, soil biome, habitats of wild species and other natural features.
- No taking of wild species of flora and fauna from natural habitats/features.
- No release of species of fauna.
- No lighting should be fixed within/on natural habitats/features.

- No deposition or storage of any material, vehicles and machinery within natural habitats.
- No off-roading within natural habitats (including soils).
- No burning within natural habitats, habitats of wild species and natural features.
- No ploughing should take place within natural habitats.
- No planting of invasive or alien species should take place.
- No creation of pathways should take place on/within natural habitats, habitats of wild species and/or natural features.
- Keep habitats and natural features clear and void of any rubbish, scrap/clutter and waste, including construction/demolition waste.
- No diversion of the natural course of water streams should take place.
- No illegal reclamation of natural sites for non-agricultural purposes.
- No further fragmentation of soiled land for non-agricultural purposes and on high quality and/or irrigated soils.

1.5 Premium:

The premium should be calculated per land area covered by natural habitats, natural features and/or habitats of wild indigenous species within the holding. With respect to individual indigenous tree species found outside natural habitat/s, the premium shall be calculated per number of trees.

2. Maintaining traditional farmland in protected areas and high nature value farmland areas

2.1 Description of measure:

Support will be provided to farmers and land managers for maintaining and protecting traditional agricultural land within protected areas and areas designated as high nature value (HNV) farmland.

Traditional agricultural land refers to fields showing a history of agricultural practices including (amongst other possible features) the presence of rubble walls, trees related to agricultural activities (such as carob and fig trees) and other traditional rural features (giren, windmills, rubble walls, old reservoirs, wells/wellheads (“herez”), open water channels (“kanali”/“swieqi”), norias (“swieni”), rock-cut steps, old rural rooms).

Protected areas refer to all areas protected under the Development Planning Act, 1992 (Act I of 1992) and the Environment Protection Act, 2001 (Act XX of 2001).

2.2 Objectives:

To maintain and protect the biodiversity, scientific, cultural and landscape values of Malta’s traditional farmland, including its diversity, in order to prevent:

- excessive application of fertilizers and pesticides in protected areas and HNV farmland areas;
- excessive use of water for irrigation purposes;
- deterioration of soil quality; and
- damage to the rural character, the traditional landscape and the cultural, biodiversity and scientific values of traditional farmland.

2.3 Beneficiaries:

Land managers and farmers.

2.4 Conditions:

- No installation or construction of greenhouses (or other forms of protective cropping structures) and reservoirs with a capacity of 455 cubic metres per tumolo or more.
- No excessive use of agro-chemicals; the use of approved agro-chemicals shall be in accordance with the nutrient requirements of the crops under cultivation.
- Plough arable agricultural land and remove weeds from such land through traditional farming practices/methods.
- Plough arable agricultural land on an irregular basis leaving the land fallow for at least <[check with RDD] months> per year.
- No removal or damage to trees/shrubs that are typical of Malta's traditional farmland, natural grass verges and natural vegetation on rubble walls.
- No alteration of or damage to the traditional characteristics of the site (including its landform), the original topography, terracing pattern, soil levels and the traditional rural features.
- No illegal reclamation of natural sites for agricultural purposes.

2.5 Premium:

The premium should be calculated per land area of traditional agricultural land within protected areas or per land area of HNV farmland, managed through traditional farming practices/methods (see definition of traditional farming systems in measure 5).

3. Management and maintenance of existing orchards of local tree varieties

3.1 Description of measure:

Support for farmers for the on-going management and maintenance of orchards, or small stands of trees, with old traditional varieties such as bambinell, White Mulberry (Cawqli), Black Mulberry (tut)*, Figs (bajtar ta' San Gwann), Olive Trees (Zebbug), Carob Trees (Harrub), Citrus Trees (Citru, especially lumicell), Jujube (Zinzel), Pear (langas), Apple (tuffieh ta' Belludja),

Almonds (Lewz morr), Plum (ghajnbaqar), Pomegranate (rummien), Medlar (naspli), Date Palm (Palma tat-Tamar), etc.

3.2 Objectives:

To protect and maintain the local autochthonous agricultural biodiversity in danger of extinction.

3.3 Beneficiaries:

Land managers and farmers.

3.4 Conditions:

- Only tree species of local varieties, certified by the Department of Agriculture (Plant Health), should be used.
- No alteration of, or damage to, the traditional characteristics of the site, its landform, soil levels and topography.
- No illegal reclamation of natural sites for agricultural purposes.

3.5 Premium:

The premium should be calculated per number of trees (old traditional varieties) under cultivation.

4. Preservation of local animal breeds and farm animal genetic resources (AnGR)

4.1 Description of measure:

Support for the preservation and breeding of local animal races including the Maltese dog (kelb tal-fenek), Maltese Ox, rabbit, goat and chicken varieties.

4.2 Objectives:

To maintain, conserve and characterize the local autochthonous animal genetic resources in danger of extinction.

4.3 Beneficiaries:

Land managers and farmers.

4.4 Conditions:

- Submission of certification of the origin of animal breeds and genetic resources, showing that they are a Maltese race.
- Keep animals in accordance with the official standards/requirements (in terms of waste management, hygiene, animal welfare, etc.) of the Department of Agriculture and the Food and Veterinary Regulation Division.
- Avoid inappropriate trampling onto agricultural land surrounding livestock farm facilities by restricting access to limited areas.

4.5 Premium:

The premium should be calculated on the kind of animal species and number of heads registered with the Department of Agriculture.

5 Organic and traditional agriculture

5.1 Description of measure:

Support for farmers managing arable agricultural land or orchards through traditional or organic farming systems.

An orchard constitutes an area of land devoted to the cultivation of fruit trees with the intention of producing fruit.

Traditional farming systems refer to farming practices which:

- (i) involves the removal of weeds from arable agricultural land through traditional farming methods and which do not involve excessive use of agro-chemicals; the use of approved agro-chemicals shall be in accordance with the nutrient requirements of the crops/fruits under cultivation;
- (ii) do not result in the production of more than <to be specified by the Department of Agriculture> types of crops per year, thus leaving the land fallow for at least <to be specified by the Department of Agriculture> months per year; and
- (iii) involve irregular ploughing of the land.
- (iv) do not involve or require greenhouses (or other forms of protective cropping structures) and reservoirs with a capacity of 455 cubic metres per tumolo or more.

5.2 Objectives:

To promote and encourage organic and traditional farming practices which are more environmentally friendly, leading to a reduction in the application of fertilizers and pesticides together with a reduction in water demand, improvement of soil functions, protection/enhancement of the local

biodiversity and which does not result in the creation of extensions to or additional buildings or structures within rural areas.

5.3 Beneficiaries:

Land managers and farmers.

5.4 Conditions:

- Only traditional/organic farming methods and techniques should be used.
- With respect to organic farming, only approved faunal species for biological control of pests should be used.
- No illegal reclamation of natural sites for agricultural purposes.
- No alteration of, or damage to, the traditional characteristics of the site (including its landform), the original topography, soil level, terracing and the traditional rural features.

5.5 Premium:

The premium should be calculated per land area of arable agricultural land under organic or traditional farming.

6. Adaptation or cessation of particular land management and/or farming practices to reduce risks of damage to features of cultural value

6.1 Description of measure:

Support will be provided for farmers and land managers in order to adapt their current practices to reduce risks of damage to, or deterioration of, cultural sites/features located within their land holdings.

Cultural heritage features/sites include: archaeological remains, historic monuments, traditional country pathways (including cobbled pathways), giren, windmills, rubble walls, old reservoirs, wells/wellheads ("herez"), open water channels ("kanali"/"swieqi"), norias ("swieni"), rock-cut steps, old rural rooms constructed in rubble, and miscellaneous traditional old rural structures and features.

6.2 Objectives:

To reduce risks of damage to and deterioration of sites/features of cultural heritage value (including historical and archaeological features/sites and remains).

6.3 Beneficiaries:

Land managers and farmers.

6.4 Conditions:

- No physical interventions on existing buildings, structures, landscape features and/or historical/cultural heritage sites should take place.
- No planting of new trees within 3 meters from cultural heritage features.
- No excavation works, including drilling of boreholes, within the buffer zone of cultural heritage features.
- Remove weeds by hand from arable agricultural land within 3 metres from cultural heritage features.
- No ploughing within a distance of 3 metres from cultural heritage features.
- No use of heavy agricultural machinery within 10m of cultural heritage sites or features or on cultivated sections of the field parcel registered for EU funding purposes.
- No dumping/storage of agricultural material, vehicles and equipment within or close to cultural heritage features.
- No letting off of fireworks within the buffer zone of cultural heritage features.

6.5 Premium:

The premium should be calculated on the loss in production as a result of change in practices.

ARTICLE 57 MEASURES

7. Restoration, enhancement and creation of natural habitats and planting of indigenous trees and shrubs

7.1 Description of measure:

Support will be provided for projects aimed at:

- Rehabilitation/ amelioration of topsoil horizon to restore its original functions;
- improving, restoring and creating natural habitats and/or habitats of wild species;
- planting of indigenous trees and shrubs on agricultural land and degraded sites; and
- planting of indigenous trees and shrubs for screening purposes and/or for enhancement of the rural landscape and character.

For the purposes of this measure, *degraded sites* refer to areas which do not have any particular ecological value. These areas are usually characterised by the presence of rubbish, dumping and the presence of opportunistic species which are characteristic of disturbed habitats.

Support will also be provided for the preparation of ecological, landscape, soil and agricultural surveys required for the implementation of such projects and for the preparation and implementation of monitoring programmes for the execution of the approved actions.

Typical actions, which could be undertaken through such projects, include:

- programmes for the re-introduction of indigenous wild species of flora and/or fauna within their context;
- introduction of typical fauna and flora, including the sensitive removal of invasive alien species and/or the replacement of such invasive alien species by indigenous ones;
- reinforcement of small populations of wild species nearing local extinction;
- planting of trees/shrubs for screening of development and enhancement of the landscape;
- programmes for the reduction of pesticide and fertilizer use in designated protected areas/sites and/or within 10 metres from watercourses;
- reinstatement of the original site characteristics, its landform, soil levels, traditional terracing and topography;
- remediation programmes for contaminated land and/or watercourses;
- expansion of existing natural habitats unless not detrimental to (but not limited to) soil health;
- reinstatement of habitats of wild species; and
- creation of new habitats.

7.2 Objectives:

To increase biodiversity and landscape value of rural areas through investments for site management projects.

7.3 Beneficiaries:

Land managers, farmers and other public/private bodies.

7.4 Conditions:

- This measure should be proposed in the form of a project aimed at enhancing the biodiversity, soil quality and landscape values of rural land.
- Submission of a management plan (including site plans, maps, photos and other illustrative material), which sets out:
 - a clear description of the land in question, its relationship to other land owned or managed by the applicant and the wider rural context;
 - an examination of the main biodiversity and landscape issues, supported by identify of soil-related concerns, that need to be addressed through this measure (prepared by a qualified ecologist, soil scientist or equivalent);
 - the type, number and distribution of the proposed actions which are intended to achieve the objective of this measure; and

- a detailed method statement for implementation, highlighting all required works and interventions for the implementation of the proposed actions.
- Prior approval is obtained from MEPA.

7.5 Premium:

The premium should be calculated per land area.

8. Establishing projects for the propagation of genetic resources of local agricultural species/varieties and/or conservation of farm animal genetic resources (AnGR)

8.1 Description of measure:

Support to institutions/persons for characterization, evaluation, collection, conservation actions, running of nurseries and/or seed/gene banks/accessions, databases and inventories as well as for the exchange of information, dissemination, training and advisory services for local animal breeds and traditional local species/cultivars/strains/varieties of crop plants, trees and vines. The same type of support is given for the conservation of indigenous and archaeophytic species.

Archaeophytic species are those which have been introduced to the Maltese islands in ancient times and which now form an integral part of the natural habitats.

Support will also be provided for:

- preparation of surveys and studies that are directly related to the protection and maintenance of gene pools and the ideal conditions for the proper protection of seeds/genes; and
- preparation and implementation of monitoring programmes for the execution of the approved actions.

8.2 Objectives:

To protect and maintain the gene pool of wild genetic resources or landraces and local autochthonous agricultural species/cultivars/strains/varieties.

8.3 Beneficiaries:

Institutions and suitably qualified persons (ecologists, botanists, plant breeders, etc.).

8.4 Conditions:

- This measure should be proposed in the form of a project aimed at protecting and maintaining the gene pool of wild genetic resources or landraces and local autochthonous agricultural species/cultivars/strains/varieties.
- Submission of a project description statement (including site plans, drawings, maps, photos and other illustrative material), setting out all structural and operational details of the project and the proposed implementation programme.
- Gene/seed banks and nurseries must be officially accredited and sustained.
- Seeds, plants and other genetic material must be officially certified.
- Prior approval is obtained from MEPA.

8.5 Funding:

The premium should be calculated on the cost of setting up the institution/project.

9. Restoration of cultural heritage, including traditional rural features and existing country pathways

9.1 Description of measure:

Support will be provided for projects for the restoration of original cultural heritage features on site. Such cultural heritage features include archaeological remains, historic monuments, traditional country pathways (including cobbled pathways), giren, windmills, rubble walls, old reservoirs, wells/wellheads (“herez”), open water channels (“kanali”/“swieqi”), norias (“swieni”), rock-cut steps, old rural rooms constructed in rubble, and miscellaneous traditional old rural structures and features.

Support will also be provided for the preparation of surveys and studies required for the implementation of such projects and for the preparation and implementing monitoring programmes for the execution of the approved actions.

The following proposed actions are NOT supported through this measure:

- use of alien or non-traditional materials or hard surfacing (e.g. concrete, tarmac) which compromises soil impermeability functions thus contributing to further soil sealing;
- interventions resulting in formalisation of cultural heritage features and rural areas;
- introduction of extraneous material (e.g. spalls – “zrar”, rubble/backfill – “terrapien”, or hardstone dust – “torba”) that might result in windborne and/or runoff-induced overspills onto site surroundings and off-site soil erosion;
- restoration of cultural heritage features out of their original context;

- redevelopment of cultural heritage features which have been destructed or damaged during restoration works undertaken as part of this measure; and
- restoration works which are not in accordance with a method statement approved by MEPA.

9.2 Objectives:

To conserve and enhance cultural heritage, the traditional rural character and traditional rural landscape features.

9.3 Beneficiaries:

Land managers, farmers and other public/private bodies.

9.4 Conditions:

- This measure should be proposed in the form of a project aimed at conserving and enhancing cultural heritage, the traditional rural character and traditional rural landscape features.
- Submission of evidence demonstrating that the cultural heritage feature is located within its original position/setting.
- Submission of a restoration method statement (including itemized costing) and a bank guarantee to MEPA's satisfaction.
- Prior approval is obtained from MEPA.
- Traditional features should be kept clean and clear of debris, paint (including makeshift signage daubed on stonework or rock faces), concrete/cement or other extraneous material.
- The accessibility of existing pathways (i.e. no RTO signs, barriers or any other blocking material) must be ensured.

9.5 Funding:

The premium should be calculated as a percentage of the restoration costs as per approved method statement.

10. Establishing environmental and cultural awareness projects

10.1 Description of measure:

Support will be given for promoting environmental and cultural awareness by organizing educational campaigns/projects through the media, school visits, distribution of leaflets or booklets, etc.

10.2 Objectives:

To increase environmental and cultural awareness amongst the general public and the farming community.

10.3 Beneficiaries:

Land managers, farmers and other public/private bodies.

10.4 Conditions:

- Awareness projects must be tailor made for different stakeholder groups.
- Accompanying publication material must be published in Maltese and English.
- Educational programmes should include initiatives that enhance visitors' hands on experiences in relation to farming activities and/or rural conservation.

10.5 Funding:

The premium should be calculated as a percentage of the costs incurred.

• AXIS 1 MEASURE

11. Sale and marketing of traditional products derived from local agricultural varieties including traditional crafts related to agriculture

11.1 Description of measure:

Encourage sale and marketing of products, such as fruits, fruit juices, saplings, etc. derived from local agricultural varieties and traditional craft products related to agriculture.

11.2 Objectives:

Promote Maltese traditional crafts and produce of local indigenous agricultural varieties, improving their presentation and marketing.

11.3 Beneficiaries:

Land managers, farmers and members of the farming community.

11.4 *Conditions:*

- The products must be labeled and have proper certification of authenticity.
- The products should be grown as a result of traditional/organic farming practices.
- The craft products should be made by members of the farming community.

11.5 *Funding:*

The premium should be calculated on the cost for investment/adaptation and the marketing expenses incurred.

Typical AEMs that may be considered from a biodiversity perspective include those:

- a) Linked to maintaining or improving, where required, the conservation status of species and habitats of Community interest that are associated with agriculture
- b) Linked to maintaining or improving, where required, the conservation status of common species that may serve as indicators of the state of the wider countryside
- c) Linked to the positive management of Natura 2000 Sites bearing in mind the site's conservation objectives or management plan
- d) Linked to enhancing the ecological connectivity of Natura 2000 sites
- e) Linked to creating or strengthening elements of a Green Infrastructure in particular those elements that are associated with agricultural ecosystems
- f) Linked to maintaining particular ecosystem services important both for agriculture productivity and biodiversity e.g. regulatory and supporting ecosystem services such as soil fertility, nutrient cycling, natural pest regulation, and pollination.