



██████████
Executive Chairperson
Planning Authority
St. Francis Ravelin
Floriana, FRN 1230

27th April 2017

Dear ██████████

**Solar Farms Policy, Final Draft SEA Screening Revisions (April 2017)
Appropriate Assessment screening in terms of Regulation 19 of the Flora,
Fauna and Natural Habitats Protection Regulations (S.L. 549.44)**

Reference is made to the Planning Authority's consultation on the revised final draft Solar Farms Policy, dated April 2017, which the Environment & Resources Authority (ERA) received by email on 24th April 2017. ERA provided comments on the previous draft Solar Farms Policy (January 2017) in March 2017.

The proposed revisions to the draft policy, dated April 2017, generally address the strategic concern that the Solar Farms Policy should seek to avoid major impacts on Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), including cumulative impacts. In particular, the revised policy highlights that "Preferred locations for solar farm installations for all quarries within, or partly within or adjacent to Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), shall be considered as following the completion of a plan-level Appropriate Assessment (AA) procedure concluding that the Solar Farms Policy does not have a significant environmental impact, including on SACs and SPAs."

I am enclosing ERA's Terms of Reference for the plan-level Appropriate Assessment of the potential impacts of the Solar Farms Policy on SACs and SPAs.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Perit Ruben Abela', is written over a light blue circular stamp.

Perit Ruben Abela
Chief Executive Officer
Environment and Resources Authority

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT OF PLANS

18.04.17

Note 1 This document is intended to set out minimum specifications that need to be satisfied in order to determine whether the plan, including the proposed intervention/s whether collectively or any part thereof, will have a significant impact on the integrity of any relevant protected sites, ecosystems, habitats and species covered by the provisions of Legal Notice 311 of 2006 and its amendments.

Note 2 The applicant is to propose consultants for ERA approval prior to the commencement of the Appropriate Assessment (AA) studies.

Note 3 It is the consultants' responsibility to adopt and justify the appropriate methodologies and areas of influence. Furthermore, in the interest of optimising the assessment process, the proposed methodology is to be discussed with ERA prior to actual commencement of the studies.

Note 4 Management plans are to be taken into account (<http://www.natura2000malta.org.mt/index.php/managmentplanning/> and <https://era.org.mt/en/Pages/Natura-2000-Datasheets-Maps.aspx>). Unless otherwise specified in these Terms of Reference (TORs) and in the absence of any site-specific conservation objectives drawn up by ERA, the assessment shall be guided by the Directive as well as the following environmental objectives:

- Where the conservation status is favourable, this is retained and not reduced; and
- Where the conservation status is not favourable, this is improved.

Note 5 The requirement for further AA studies as well as any other AA-relevant impacts identified by the consultants need to be addressed. Should further surveys or research be deemed necessary by the consultants, ERA is to be informed of such need PRIOR to the commencement of such surveys and, or research.

Note 6 Wherever available, already-existing information should be made use of without any unnecessary duplication of work. Any uncertainties and gaps in information should be acknowledged.

Note 7 The consultants should refer to the appropriate EU guidance documents, and should clearly quote such sources accordingly.

Note 8 ERA reserves the right to question (or disagree with) the methodologies and area of influence, to request revisions thereof, and to request additional information or studies at any stage prior to, during and following completion of the AA.

Note 9 These TORs are primarily intended to guide the AA investigations rather than as a basis for tendering or other non-ERA processes. In this regard any use for such purposes is at the sole risk of the applicant, as requirements may vary following technical negotiations, updating of legislation or standards, changes to the proposed project, or other circumstances.

The Appropriate Assessment report should follow the following format:

1. Executive Non-Technical Summary

A description of the salient points of the AA study including any surveys, impacts and their significance, proposed revisions, and any residual impacts.

2. Plan Description

A description of the proposed plan, with particular emphasis on those elements that are likely to give rise to potentially significant effects on the integrity of protected sites, or on other relevant habitats, species and ecosystems. The description shall also address any foreseeable consequential requirements or implications of the proposal (e.g. need for new or altered access or infrastructure).

3. Impact Assessment

This section should identify all relevant protected sites¹, including their natural habitats and characteristics, which are likely to be affected by the plan or by any of its ancillary projects and proposals, both directly and indirectly, including potential cumulative impacts.

Interventions proposed within the plan that have the potential to affect protected sites or other relevant habitats, species or ecosystems, but for which no detailed information is as yet available due to the strategic nature of the plan, must be acknowledged.

Interventions that are proposed within the plan should be assessed, holistically and individually, to identify which protected sites are likely to be affected, including cumulative impacts, by their implementation. The AA should assess all proposed interventions in the plan, including (but not limited to) proposals located within and/or adjacent to the protected sites. The AA should also discuss how these protected sites will be affected by these proposals and to what extent, i.e. whether such impacts are considered to affect the integrity of the protected sites, their habitats and species, or otherwise. This should also include an assessment of the likely cumulative impacts of these proposals on the protected sites. An exhaustive discussion, in so far as possible, is required in this regard.

Impact assessment should also take into account practical implications (e.g. conflicts with site protection or management plan implementation, any foreseeable constraints on future management plan formulation, implications arising via the displacement of other land/sea uses, etc.)

4. Alternatives

The AA should evaluate alternatives to those aspects of the plan that may give rise to significant impacts as identified in the section above. The zero-option (do-nothing scenario) should also be considered. Each alternative should be thoroughly assessed by comparing it with the respective plan content, clearly indicating the relative effects on relevant habitats, species, and protected sites as a whole.

This section should conclude with a set of recommended revisions to the plan.

5. Residual Impacts

The report should include a prediction of residual impacts and implications of the proposed plan on relevant species, habitats and ecosystems, following the implementation of the proposed revisions. The report shall also evaluate the significance of such residual impacts and implications.

¹ As defined in Subsidiary Legislation 549.44. Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Protection Regulations, Legal Notice 311 of 2006 as amended.