

**ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES AUTHORITY**  
Minutes of Board Meeting held on the 06 March 2026  
Hexagon House, Marsa

**7089. Environmental Impact Assessment Process (EA 00007/18) related to PA/05908/23 -** Proposed conversion from a temporary to a permanent tuna farming area as established in PA 2175/18; to setup the North Aquaculture Zone (NAZ) intended exclusively for tuna farming. Site off Sikka l-Bajda, Sikka l-Bajda, San Pawl il-Bahar

*Related material circulated prior to the meeting.*

The Chairman invited the EIA Coordinator to deliver the presentation.

Mr Adrian Mallia, the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) coordinator, began his presentation by giving an overview of the proposal for the conversion of a temporary tuna farm approved through PA 02175/18 into a permanent one and for the setting up of the North Aquaculture Zone intended for tuna farming. No changes to the current location, number of cages or biomass of 3,300 tonnes were proposed. The original proposal had been subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) in 2018. Thus, updated studies were required in order to allow comparison between the monitoring data with the original studies of the temporary site, focussing on impacts on the seabed, water quality, seabirds and on the Natura 2000 site itself.

The updated studies confirmed that environmental impacts from the proposed transition to a permanent tuna farming area are generally minor, localised, and reversible, with no significant deterioration in water quality or Natura 2000 features. Key impacts relate mainly to organic deposition beneath cages, increasing marine litter, operational interactions with seabirds, such as fish-slime oiling and the attraction of seabirds to farming operations, and impacts on the human population in terms of fish-slime reaching the coastline. Mitigation measures therefore focus on strengthening feed management to limit organic loading, enhancing litter control and recovery efforts, improving patrolling and oil-collection response systems, considering alternative artificial feed to reduce spills, and ensuring low-intensity navigational lighting only. Ongoing year-round monitoring and adherence to permit conditions remain essential to maintain environmental performance and safeguard protected habitats.

Mr Mallia noted that consultation feedback raised no particular concerns, with most points adequately addressed through permit conditions. The concern regarding the relocation of cages outside the AFM firing arc was identified as a third-party matter.

The Chairman then invited the Directorate to make the presentation.

The Directorate gave a presentation to the Board, noting that an Addendum to the EIA and AA was submitted in March 2025, underwent a 30-day public consultation, and was finalised in December 2025 following review and consideration of feedback.

Noting the environmental monitoring data and the conclusions of the EIA and AA, the Directorate determined that the proposal is unlikely to result in significant residual environmental effects. It was therefore concluded that ERA's findings on the original EIA and AA remain valid, subject to reinforced farm management practices, continued year-round monitoring, the submission of a mooring block method statement, and adherence to environmental permitting conditions, including measures to minimise disturbance from light and noise.

Chairman asked the Environmental Impact Assessment Coordinator and the applicant if they had any further points to raise.

Mr Francesco Lombardo, on behalf of the applicant, highlighted the need to monitor interactions between seabirds and fish farms and noted that the Department of Fisheries will be commissioning a project to study this matter further.

There were no comments from the members of the public.

The Chairman then opened the discussion to the Board members.

KFS remarked on the issue of fish-slime, and requested clarity on the mitigation measures. Mr Mallia explained that the main challenge remains farm management, with fish-slime originating largely from baitfish and that reductions may be possible through improved practices or the eventual use of artificial feeds, although this requires further discussion and extends beyond purely environmental considerations. Enhanced patrolling was also suggested. The Directorate clarified that the remit of the EIA assessment concerns the location of the farm, and that the recommendations pertain to the development consent, with the continued operation of the fish farm to be regulated through the Environmental Permit.

The ERA Board was then requested to vote on the final assessment as proposed by the Directorate.

Board members voting **in favour** of the Directorate's final assessment:

Perit Vincent Cassar, Chairman

Prof. Emmanuel Sinagra, Deputy Chairman

Mr Kurt Farrugia

Prof. Saviour Formosa

Perit Kevin Fsadni

Mr Isaak Koroma

Board members **against** the Directorate's final assessment:

Mr Martin Galea De Giovanni

The Board **approved** the final assessment recommended by the Directorate.

MS. LORNA FARRUGIA  
ERA BOARD SECRETARY