MEMORANDUM

TO: Perit Vincent Cassar – Chairman

FROM: Christine Tanti – Unit Manager

CC: Kevin Mercieca – CEO
Aimee Brincat – Director
Alexander Camilleri – Deputy Director

DATE: August 2026

SUBJECT: EA 00020/22 - PA/06096/23
Proposed Thermal Treatment Facility in the ECOHIVE Complex, including plant building, storage building, administration building, waste water treatment, tank farm and cisterns

Site at, ECOHIVE Complex, Tul il-Kosta, Naxxar

1. Introduction and Case Background

PA/06096/23 is a full development application for a Thermal Treatment Facility (TTF) within the ECOHIVE Complex for the incineration of hazardous waste.

Proposal has been assessed by ERA through the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. Such EIA was requested following screening in accordance with the EIA Regulations (S.L. 549.46), specifically the following criteria in Schedule I, Category I, Section 5.0.1.1: *Waste disposal installations for the incineration, chemical treatment (as defined in Annex I to Directive 2008/98/EC on waste under heading D9), or landfilling of hazardous waste as defined in that Directive.*

The proposal was also assessed by ERA through an Appropriate Assessment (AA) following screening in accordance with the Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Protection Regulations (S.L. 549.44) given the location and potential impacts of the proposal vis-à-vis the following Natura 2000 sites:

- MT0000007- Is-Salini designated as a terrestrial Special Area of Conservation via Government Notice 1379 of 2016; and
- MT0000008 - L-Għadira s-Safra u l-Iskoll tal-Għallis designated as a terrestrial Special Area of Conservation via Government Notice 1522 of 2019, in accordance with the Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Protection Regulations (S.L.549.44).
- MT0000105 - Żona fil-Baħar bejn il-Ponta ta' San Dimitri (Għawdex) u Il-Qaliet designated as a marine Special Area of Conservation of International Importance via Government Notice 682 of 2018;
- MT0000107 - Żona fil-Baħar fil-Grigal, designated as a Special Area of Conservation via Government Notice No. 1311 of 2016; and

- MT0000112 - Żona fil-Baħar ta' Madwar Għawdex designated as a marine Special Protected Area via Government Notice 1311 of 2016.

A concise summary of the EIA and AA process, its ancillary process and the salient findings is annexed.

The consultants' EIA and AA reports along with all the relevant documentation can be accessed from the ERA website, through the following link: https://era.org.mt/era-project/pa-06096-23/.

2. Overview and main findings of the EIA Report

The EIA Coordinated Assessment has identified a number of moderate and major residual adverse impacts on land use, agricultural land and terrestrial ecology, landscape character and visual amenity, water bodies (groundwater recharge), archaeology.

Land use, agricultural land and terrestrial ecology

- The change of land use is assessed as *major adverse*.
- The loss of agricultural land will lead to an overall loss of ODZ land from the excavation and construction of the facility; such impact is assessed as *moderate to major adverse*.
- Loss of terrestrial habitats and species - *moderate adverse* since circa 85 trees will be affected, 50 of which are of protected species.
- Loss of soil, rubble walls and ecological characteristics are assessed as *moderate adverse*.

Landscape and visual amenity

- Deterioration of the landscape value during construction works at Viewpoints 1 to 7 due to the presence of construction and excavation machinery, cranes; dust; noise; vibration and associated works on the landscape elements is assessed as *moderate adverse.*
- Reduction of the visual amenity of potential visual receptors from Viewpoints 3, 4, 5 and 7 due to the presence of construction and excavation machinery, cranes; dust; noise; vibration and associated works is assessed as *moderate adverse.*
- Deterioration of the landscape value during operations due to the presence of TTF Building at ECOHIVE complex and take up of agricultural land on the landscape elements is assessed as follows:
    - Viewpoints 1, 2, 6 and 7: *major adverse*; and
    - Viewpoints 3 to 5: *moderate adverse.*
- Reduced visual amenity from Viewpoints 3, 4, 5 and 7 due to the presence of TTF Building at ECOHIVE complex and take up of agricultural land on potential visual receptors is *moderate adverse*.

Water bodies

- Groundwater salinisation due to paving of agricultural areas resulting in depletion of groundwater recharge is *moderate adverse*.
- Flooding due to paving agricultural areas resulting in increase of runoff flow rates is *moderate adverse*.

Archaeology and cultural heritage

- Loss of features and change in the context and cultural landscape resulting from excavation and demolition/ dismantling of rural structures is assessed as *moderate adverse*.
- Potential damage to cultural and/or archaeological features below the ground during excavation works is *moderate adverse*.
- Deterioration of cultural landscape resulting from the construction phase and the presence of the proposed development once constructed is *major adverse*.

Beneficial residual impacts

- The improved capacity to treat hazardous waste is *major beneficial.*

Cumulative residual impacts

- Flooding of the water catchment resulting from paving of agricultural areas is *moderate adverse*;
- Fragmentation and loss of agricultural land are *moderate adverse*;
- Loss of features and change in the context and cultural landscape resulting from excavation and demolition/ dismantling of rural structures are *moderate adverse; and*
- Change in land use from existing agricultural land is *major adverse* even after the implementation of mitigation measures (i.e. landscaping).

3. Overview and main findings of the AA Report

The AA report concluded that the proposed development is unlikely to have significant adverse effects on nearby Natura 2000 sites due to its considerable distance from these protected areas. Potential impacts are mainly indirect and include light pollution, noise, dust generation, and atmospheric emissions from the facility. The most notable risk concerns light pollution, which could disturb protected seabird species associated with the marine SPA and increase the risk of disorientation and grounding. Construction activities may also temporarily affect species in surrounding agricultural areas. However, impacts on habitats and species are expected to be effectively mitigated through the implementation of Best Available Techniques (BAT), emission controls, and other good practice measures in line with light pollution guidelines.

Residual impacts on habitats, protected species, and ecological processes are considered insignificant and the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites is not expected to be adversely affected, and the conservation status of protected species will remain unchanged. The proposed mitigation measures are consistent with the sites' conservation objectives, ensuring that habitat protection and species conservation targets remain fully achievable.

4. Directorate's Assessment and Recommendations

The proposal would result in various significant residual impacts on land use, agricultural land and terrestrial ecology, landscape and visual amenity, water bodies and archaeology and cultural heritage. With respect to the latter, the Directorate has the following conclusions and recommendations:

a) With regards to impacts on terrestrial ecology and the take-up of undeveloped rural land, it is acknowledged that the proposed development would result in major and moderate significant effects. However, given the strategic need to consolidate waste management facilities within the ECOHIVE complex, similar impacts would arise under all alternative site configurations considered and are therefore regarded as unavoidable.

b) In terms of landscape character and visual amenity, the photomontages submitted indicate that the development would constitute a major visual intrusion notwithstanding the mitigation measures incorporated during the design stage. Nevertheless, the existing baseline is already characterised by the prominent presence of the adjacent landfill, which forms a dominant backdrop within the wider landscape. While the visual effects remain significant, it is recommended that additional design refinements and landscaping be explored during the finalisation of the project to further minimise these impacts.

c) With regard to the loss of existing archaeological features and potential damage to unknown archaeological remains below ground, the impact is moderate. Such impact can be effectively minimised through the preservation of existing cultural heritage features *in situ* where feasible, or through their relocation to another suitable location where preservation is not possible. In addition, all ground-disturbing works should be subject to archaeological monitoring to minimise the risk of adverse effects on both known and previously unidentified cultural heritage features. Any works affecting archaeological or cultural heritage features shall be undertaken only following the necessary clearance and approval from the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage (SCH), and in accordance with any conditions it may impose.

d) The Waste Management Plan outlines the need for the centralisation of waste management facilities including the approved Waste to Energy and the approved Organic Processing Plant, the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) and the Thermal Treatment Facility (TTF). Cumulative impacts are inevitable, both beneficial and adverse. The said impacts mainly include land take-up and excavation, landscape and visual amenity, light, noise and air emissions.

The proposal is aligned with the objectives of Malta's Waste Management Plan (2021–2030), addressing key priorities including the reduction of waste exports and the modernisation and centralisation of waste management infrastructure. While acknowledging the identified residual impacts, the Directorate notes that alternative design options have been assessed and appropriate mitigation measures incorporated into the proposed development. The do-nothing scenario is not considered a viable alternative, as it would hinder the implementation of the Plan's objectives and Malta's efforts to improve waste management performance and reduce reliance on waste exports.

Following its assessment of the proposal, and taking into consideration the consultants' evaluation, the Directorate considered that the long-term environmental and operational benefits of the proposal are considered to outweigh the identified adverse effects.

In view of the above considerations, the Directorate does not object to this proposal, subject to the implementation of stringent mitigation measures and pre-emptive safeguards throughout the construction and operation phases of the proposed development. In this regard, a number of conditions listed in Section 5 below, are being recommended for inclusion in the development permit.

5. Recommended Conditions

5.1 Pre-Commencement submissions

5.1.1 A comprehensive and reasonably exhaustive document is to be submitted, explaining how the proposed works will be carried out with the least possible damage to the site and its surroundings. The submission shall address all the relevant environmental considerations to ERA's satisfaction and shall include:

a) A description of the envisaged works for each phase/stage of the project;
b) The measures proposed to avoid, mitigate or reduce environmental impacts;
c) A programme of works and proposed management arrangements for all the phases of the works;
d) An environmental monitoring and reporting programme indicating how progress of works will be monitored, recorded and reported in a timely manner to enable immediate action, as required;
e) A contingency plan for any risks of accidental damage and other potential risks to the environment; and
f) Any relevant plans, drawings and photos related to the above.

No works shall commence on site prior to the approval by ERA of the submission.

5.1.2 In accordance with Regulation 5(4) of the *Construction and Demolition Waste Framework Regulations* (S.L. 549.161), the proposal requires the submission of a Pre-Demolition Audit (PDA) prior to the issuance of the commencement notice of works by the Building and Construction Authority. The PDA is to be submitted to the Environment and Resources Authority at through the following link. The list of warranted architects, surveyors or duly qualified environmental consultants eligible to carry out such audits can be found here.

5.1.3 Prior to the commencement of any works on site, ERA's compliance and enforcement Unit is to be formally notified at least five working days ahead on ced.consult.era@era.org.mt.

5.1.4 The proposed interventions on protected trees requires an environmental permit from ERA in line with S.L. 549.123, prior to the commencement of works affecting such trees.

5.1.5 The construction of the facility shall not commence until the following have been submitted and approved by ERA:

a) method statement for the preparation of the baseline report pursuant to the Industrial Emissions (IPPC) Regulations and in accordance with the European Commission Guidance concerning baseline reports under Article 22(2) of Directive 2010/75/EU on industrial emissions (2014/C 136/03); and
b) the baseline report following approval of the aforementioned method statement. The baseline investigation shall be completed prior to the commencement of operations.

5.1.6 The executable version of the development permit, together with the approved plans and commencement notice, shall not be issued until the applicant has submitted an application for an IPPC Permit in accordance with the Industrial Emissions (Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control) Regulations (S.L. 549.77) and the application has been validated by ERA.

5.1.7 The facility shall be designed and operated in accordance with all applicable Best Available Techniques (BAT) conclusions and relevant environmental legislation, including but not limited to:
a) BAT for slaughterhouses and animal by-products industries;
b) BAT for waste incineration; and
c) relevant horizontal BREF documents, including emissions from storage, energy efficiency and industrial cooling systems, where applicable.

5.1.8 The proposal shall comply with the requirements of the Industrial Emissions (Waste Incineration) Regulations (S.L. 549.81).

5.2 Construction works

5.2.1 All works covered by this development permission (including material and temporary installations, vehicles and machinery used for the works as well as any material or waste generated by the works) shall be restricted to the areas approved for such purpose. Works outside such areas are prohibited and there shall be no encroachment or overspills onto surrounding land.

5.2.2 All works shall be carefully managed so as not to cause damage to any habitat beyond the area and depth approved for development.

5.2.3 Any infilled, caverns, hollows, Quaternary deposits or other features of potential geological, geomorphological or palaeontological interest which are known or discovered shall be reported immediately to ERA and any other relevant authorities (e.g. the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage). No further works or activities shall take place which would disturb or risk causing disturbance to these features, until these entities conclude their investigations.

5.2.4 No construction works shall be carried out during night-time hours. Any deviation from this requirement shall require the prior written approval of the Environment and Resources Authority (ERA), supported by a detailed justification and appropriate mitigation measures to minimise disturbance to the surrounding environment.

5.3 Waste management

5.3.1 All operations concerning the management of waste are subject to all relevant regulations, including the Waste Regulations (S.L.549.63) and the Waste Management (Activity Registration) Regulations (S.L.549.45).

5.3.2 Uncontaminated, inert material resulting from excavation, demolition and/or construction shall be used within the same site (as long as such use is in line with the approved plans and other conditions of this permit), or shall be transported in accordance with the relevant waste management regulations and deposited at sites duly authorised by the ERA to accept such waste.

5.4 Runoff and effluent management, and containment of overspills/pollutants

5.4.1 All measures shall be adopted to avoid overspills and pollution of the adjacent rural, coastal and marine environment, including through the action of adverse weather conditions.

5.4.2 The development shall not result in any intended or unintended discharge of surface water (other than clean overflow from runoff-collection reservoirs), wash waters, operational effluents or overflows, sewage, spillages, seepages or leakages from the development site into the ground or onto any surrounding lands or into the sea.

5.5 Landscaping plan

5.5.1 A detailed Landscaping Plan shall be submitted within six (6) months from the issuing of this development permit, for the Environment and Resources Authority's approval. The landscaping plan (including the type of species used, the planting layout, ancillary/preparatory works, etc.) shall respect the site context and the surrounding landscape, and shall be duly adapted to the general topography, land contours and ecological characteristics of the site and its surroundings. Landscaping shall be in line with the approved landscaping plan and any adjustments are to be agreed with ERA in advance.

The plan shall also conform to the following specifications:

a) the planting shall consist of appropriate indigenous and/or archaeophytic species, and due attention shall be paid to the avoidance of species and assemblages that are alien to the surrounding environmental and landscape context;
b) the plan shall clearly indicate the location of all existing, proposed and retained trees/shrubs/ vegetation within the site, including the respective scientific and vernacular names, as well as any measures that will be implemented to prevent damage to any trees/shrubs/vegetation that will be retained as well as to any other relevant environmental features;

c) the plan shall also identify all other relevant interventions that are envisaged (e.g. earth mounding/reprofiling, fencing and existing rubble walls; any soft and hardened surfaces; and any outdoor furniture). Site formalisation, hard-landscaping and introduction of extraneous structures shall be avoided/kept to a minimum.

5.6 Mitigating light pollution

5.6.1 The permitted development shall not be a source of light pollution, especially at night. To this effect, the following specifications shall be adhered to:

d) lighting shall be strictly limited to areas where it is operationally necessary, and the height, orientation and intensity of lighting shall be designed to minimise illumination beyond the developed footprint of the site, insofar as is reasonably practicable;

e) lighting of ancillary access roads, tracks, paths or areas beyond the site boundary shall be limited to locations required for operational safety, security or emergency purposes;

f) the exterior lighting fittings and their supports shall be installed on the inner side of any peripheral landscaping, so as to be screened from the surrounding environment by means of the landscaping itself;

g) all exterior lighting installed on site shall be horizontally aligned, downward-pointing, fully-shielded and full cut-off. No luminaire globes, uplighters and/or high-level floodlighting are allowed;

h) all external lighting shall utilise low-intensity warm-white lighting with a correlated colour temperature not exceeding 3000 K, unless a higher colour temperature is demonstrated to be necessary for operational safety or security; and

i) where relevant, lighting shall be intruder-triggered or motion-sensor activated, so as to avoid continuous nocturnal lighting.