

BirdLife Malta

Appeal to PA/05372/17 proposed development to externalise activities of an operational restaurant within the Dwejra SPA/SAC

2 March 2018

Public consultation process – August 4, 2018

BirdLife Malta submitted the following representation on August 4, 2018, for the proposed development:

“The development in question is not strictly compatible with the objective of achieving a favourable conservation status for the site and its species, and hence should be fully scrutinised in line with the objectives of keeping this site pristine as much as possible, rather than commercialising the area. It appears no detailed lighting scheme has been asked of the developer, apart from the fact that any exterior lighting in this area shall have an effect on the avifauna of the area. The areas in the immediate vicinity of the restaurant hold substantial numbers of Scopoli’s Shearwater which are sensitive to light and noise pollution which the activities in question will invariably generate. The justification why the operator in question needs to expand his activity is not clear – but this possibly conflicts with the above. All such clarifications should be made available through an Appropriate Assessment of the proposed activities, as well as the developer/operator should seek full compliance via a nature permit for operating within the confines of a Natura 2000 site. Screening should also be carried with ERA of the proposed and current operations of this site. In the absence of the above being clarified and ascertained, the permit should not be granted.”

The development site lies in or is surrounded by several protected sites:

1. Special Protected Area (MT0000030) Rđumijiet ta' Ghawdex: Il-Ponta ta' San Dimitri sa Il-Ponta ta' Harrux designated under the Wild Birds Directive (79/409/EEC)
2. Il-Qawra, Dwejra (MALT_063) Bird Sanctuary (surrounding area)
3. Natura 2000 Dwejra - Qawra (l-Inhawi), inkluz Hagret il-General (MALT_141/MT0000019) designated as Special Area of Conservation - International Importance and designated under the Habitats Directive

We would like to use the chance to discuss potential environmental impacts in depth below.

Light pollution and seabirds

Seabirds of the Order Procellariiformes are known to be highly affected by light pollution near their breeding colonies. One of the main consequences is the phenomenon of young birds being disoriented by artificial light sources and ending up stranded inland.

Although the subject demands further insight, light pollution might be having a very relevant impact on populations of three seabird species in Malta: the Yelkouan Shearwater (*Puffinus yelkouan*), the Scopoli's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*) and the European Storm-petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*).

Seabirds in Dwejra area

In the area around Dwejra there are important colonies of seabirds breeding. Scopoli's shearwater and Yelkouan shearwater breeds all around the west coast of Gozo. From San Dimitri to Xlendi there are 1050 breeding pairs of Scopoli's shearwater (Figure 1), 80 to 150 Yelkouan shearwaters (Figure 2) (Sultana et al. 2011), and 30-60 breeding pairs of Mediterranean Storm petrel (Figure 3) (Barbara, 2015).

Effects of development proposed in Dwejra

The fledglings of these three species are attracted to sources of light during the fledging period. The area between Wardija point and San Dimitri is one of the darkest areas of the Maltese islands. Any new sources of light in the area close to the cliffs like the one proposed in Dwejra will increase the number of grounded birds during fledgling period and suppose a new threat to breeding populations of seabirds that are currently declining. Besides the effect of light pollution on fledglings, the proposed development will increase the level of light pollution on the colonies itself in the cliffs of Dwejra, adding a new source of disturbance to breeding colonies that are already suffering other threats.

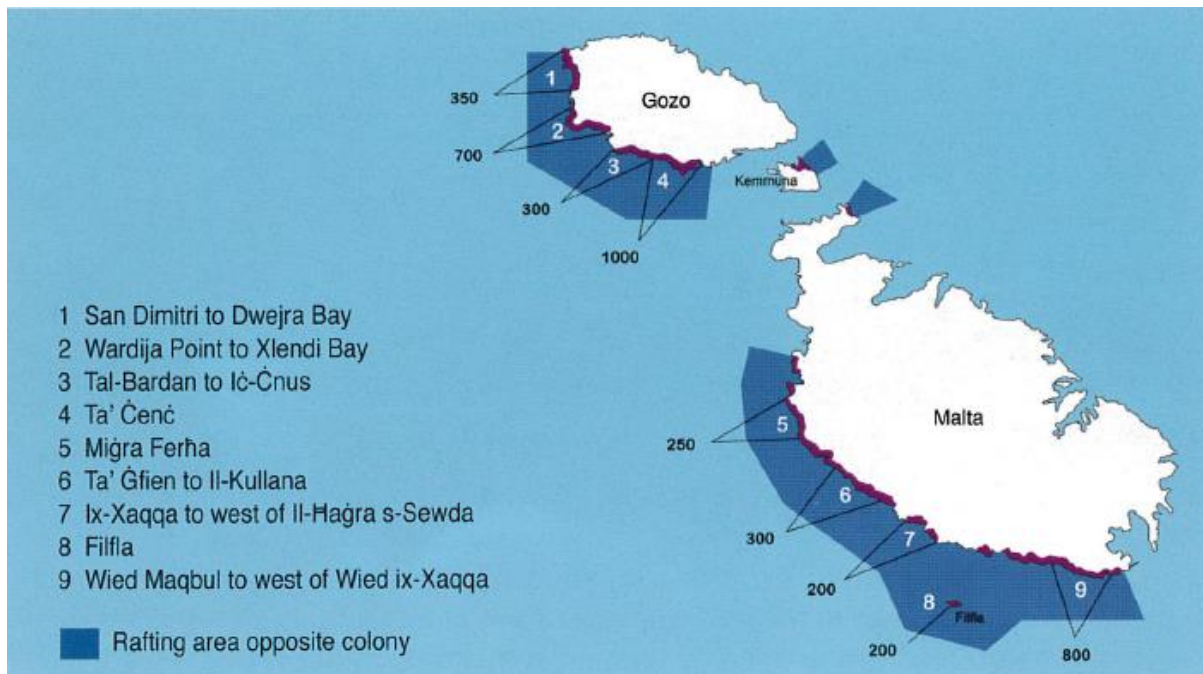


Figure 1. Scopolis shearwater distribution in the Maltese Islands (Sultana et al. 2011)

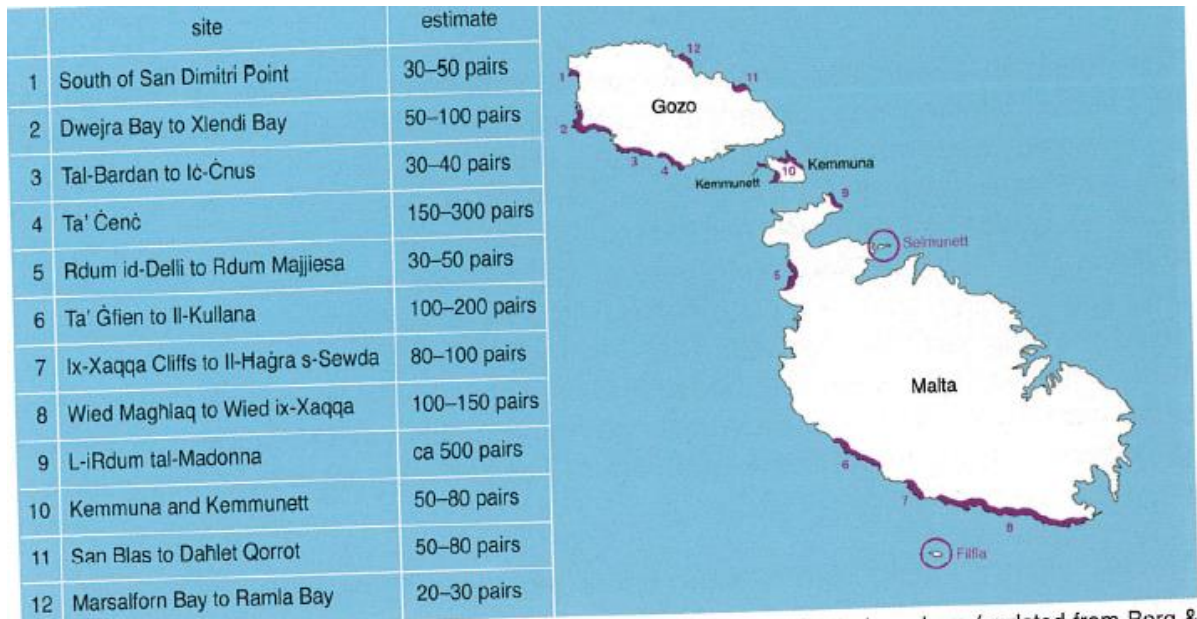


Figure 2. Yelkouan shearwater distribution in the Maltese Islands (Sultana et al. 2011)

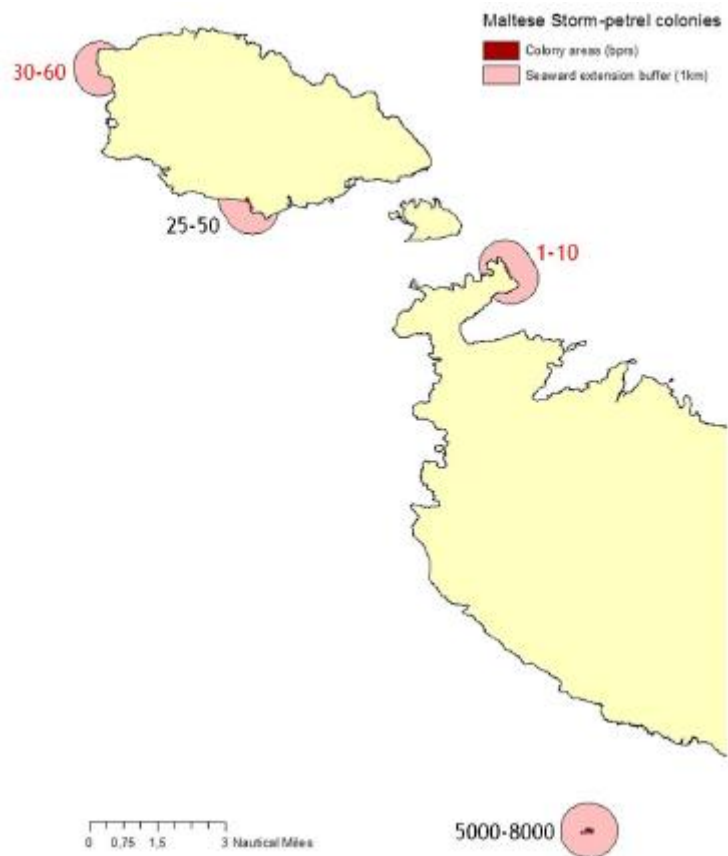


Figure 3. Mediterranean Storm petrel distribution in the Maltese Islands (Barbara, 2015)

REFERENCES

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