



Questions for political parties and their candidates to the 2019-2024 European Parliament

European Parliament Elections 25th May 2019

On Saturday 25th May 2019, Maltese citizens will be joining their counterparts in the other EU Member States and vote to elect a new European Parliament.

It is now beyond any reasonable doubt that the global economy is leading to massive climate change that poses an existential threat to humanity. It is also beyond any reasonable doubt that human activities are causing a collapse of biodiversity and an impoverishment of ecosystems on a massive scale.

So in view of the important EU elections this May, we've drafted a set of 5 priority issues which we are calling on political parties in Malta and their candidates for the MEP elections to consider, promote and endorse. These include global issues but also local environmental activities that might not fall in line with the spirit of conservation.

From ODZ development to climate change, from hunting and trapping derogations to the need of better enforcement, from the transport challenges to clean air, from biodiversity loss to unsustainable fisheries and bycatch...we shall be sharing this manifesto with all of Malta's European Parliament candidates and requesting their responses to each of the 10 questions below.

Before it is too late, we need the citizens of Europe to stand up and be counted. The next European elections are a perfect opportunity to put environment on the agenda!

1. Protecting nature and biodiversity

Despite world-class legislation and good intentions, the EU is about to miss its 2020 target of halting biodiversity loss. We are not only losing unique species and our natural heritage, but we are also eroding the living systems that sustain our societies and human beings. Biodiversity continues to vanish, mainly due to intensive farming, damaging infrastructure development and serious underfinancing of effective conservation action.

Q1: According to an evaluation led by the European Commission, the EU budget co-finances only a fraction (9-19%) of what is needed to implement Natura 2000 – the EU's network of protected areas. Do you agree that next EU budget must significantly increase and is protection of biodiversity and natural ecosystems amongst your priorities? What will you do to ensure that Malta and the EU stop losing their biodiversity and get on the path of recovery of nature?

Protection of biodiversity and our ecosystems is one of my priorities, and it should be everyone's priority. The EU currently invests in hi-tech R&D and it can use the result of these efforts to help protect our environment. The EU's investment in precision agriculture, for example, could become a standard in Europe, or use of this high-end EU tech could be tied to CAP payments. This way everyone wins and we do not need to discuss taking money away from some other interest group to fund Natura 2000.

Q2: If there is one piece of legislation that all the EU agrees that it is healthy and relevant, these are the Nature Directives (Birds and Habitats). Are you comfortable with Malta derogating from these Directives solely for the enjoyment of a small part of the population such as for hunting in spring and trapping? Especially when hunting is done during the spring migration when birds are heading to their breeding grounds, and even more importantly when many of these, like the Turtle Dove, are in decline and declared as vulnerable by the EU and IUCN?

I am not comfortable with any derogation if it is just for entertainment. There are many other better arguments for derogations but this is not one of them.

As I've stated before I'm not a hunter myself; as long as laws are respected they can continue to enjoy their hobby.

Q3: How do you feel about the fact that a few politicians remain adamant to find further loopholes even within ECJ rulings such as that which stopped Malta from continuing with finch trapping? What message does this send to our community when laws, and now even court rulings, are bent backwards with no justification?

An unfortunate side effect of laws is loopholes. I would encourage institutions like the ECJ to be clearer in their decisions. With simple judgements we will have fewer loopholes.

With laws we also have lobbyists to worry about who may introduce these loopholes in the first place. A strong lobby register coupled with proper guidelines about lobbying will help our august institutions.

Q4: In its latest country report on environmental implementation for Malta the European Commission asks the Government to pull its socks up with regards to the Natura 2000 sites designation process and the implementation of management plans for these protected sites. How will you, if elected, make sure that Malta comes in line not only with its obligations on Natura 2000 sites but also in regard to protecting the ever-decreasing Outside Development Zones (ODZs)?

If elected as MEP I will not be in a position to control the wheels of power within a national government. However, I will be able to call out any country which is shirking its responsibilities, including Malta.

I am going to reserve the right to provide a more detailed answer regarding ODZ development. My current understanding of the matter is limited; I am under the impression this is a matter of national competence, not European, so I shall research the subject before commenting further.

2. Bringing oceans back from the brink

The reformed Common Fisheries Policy and Marine Spatial Planning Directive brought some hope that years of fisheries mismanagement and damage to ecosystems would end. However, due to inadequate implementation and wrong targeting of funds, oceans continue degrading because of human activities, resulting in seabird bycatch, pollution,

uncoordinated offshore development and climate change. Furthermore EU institutions have repeatedly put the short-term interests of powerful fishing lobbies before scientific advice.

Q5: Mapping and protection of sensitive species and habitats should precede determination of human activities in the marine environment. Do you agree? What steps will you take to ensure that spatial planning and management plans truly ensure sustainable use of the seas, especially with regards to our Maltese Coastal and Marine Protected Areas?

I see fisheries and marine planning to be a European problem, not a national one. This is one of those areas where the EU should have the authority to work as a single entity to protect our common marine environment. This should not be left to national interests; our responsibility and authority should be pooled into a single institution or Agency which can handle the entire problem holistically.

Q6: Would you support taking fishing quotas and authorisations out of the direct control of EU member states (Ministers) and base them on binding scientific advice and first principles such as ensuring stock recovery and preservation of threatened species?

Yes, I would provided there is a central control on all this. It ties into my previous answer.

3. Giving Europe healthy food and a living farmland

The EU spends almost €60 billion a year for an obsolete and unfair Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) – the policy that supports the intensive model of agriculture that is damaging nature and climate. Furthermore, the CAP fails farmers both at the social and economic level, so that many smaller farms disappear, and generational renewal is at risk.

Q7: The loss of biodiversity (birds, butterflies, pollinators) in the farmland, pollution of water, loss of soil, driven to a large extent by unsustainable farming, is alarming. Do you agree that the future CAP must seriously invest into rectifying this problem by allocating at least 50% of its budget to environmental and climate measures?

I'm not sure 50% is the right figure; perhaps more, perhaps less is needed.

I shall couple this point with my answer to Q1. Europe has developed the technology its farmers can use to be more efficient and to therefore save our biodiversity. There is no reason why we shouldn't mandate use of certain technologies if we are to provide funding under CAP,.

4. Preventing dangerous climate change

The fight against climate change is one of the biggest challenges facing our society. Current trends of dangerous increases in temperatures pose an existential threat to society and will push a huge number of species to extinction within the next few decades. There is a need for a new, long-term climate protection strategy with the goal to reach climate neutrality, including a transition to a clean, properly sited, sustainable renewables-based energy system that works in harmony with nature.

Q8: Do you agree that to be in line with the 1.5°C goal of the Paris Agreement, the EU needs to step up its climate change ambition, namely greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by at least 55%, energy efficiency has to be increased by 40% and the share of renewable energies needs to be increased to at least 45% by the year 2030?

This is an interesting question because we often forget one quick way of reducing emissions is if we have more nuclear power stations. Many people are afraid of such technology because of incidents like Chernobyl, even if the technology has advanced considerably since those days.

Another factor is that Europe is comparatively small compared to continents like Asia. Reducing our carbon footprint alone will not be enough to stop climate change.

My opinion is that moving towards cleaner energy sources is a good thing and should be encouraged. We also must lead the world in the same direction if our efforts are to count for something. Unless our neighbours also change, we will all face the same problem.

Q9: With rather alarming pollution readings which are also contributing to climate change, how do you see Malta solving this health issue? Only 1.5% of our cars are electric while our ever-growing cruise liner industry contributes to high air pollution levels mainly in the Grand Harbour area and the southern localities. Would you support the drive to designate the Mediterranean Sea as an Emission Control Area (ECA)?

I need to see the data before I can give you a complete answer.

I can tell you I've [written about pollution](#) before. We need to monitor - and expose - our pollution levels if we are to convince the general public of the need to act in this regard

5. Waste and plastics

With the increase in populations across Europe and visibly also in Malta, together with the increased consumption rate both from citizens and tourists, today waste has become a daunting challenge to manage. The biggest concerns are mainly plastics, which end up in the sea. However Malta also has a problem with waste resulting from massive development projects.

Q10: Do you support the removal of all single-use plastics across the EU Member States? Do you see a future problem for our country with regards to the waste generated from major infrastructural projects and what are the solutions you envisage for this, without impacting the natural habitat, both marine and on land?

I do support the removal of all single-use plastics.

I see a current and future problem related to waste generated from infrastructural projects. I do not understand why the cost of exporting this waste (and getting it processed elsewhere) is not factored into the cost of these projects. This would strike me as a simple way of (a) preventing a larger problem on our limited island; (b) making sure the polluter pays; and (c) eliminating any impact whatsoever on our natural habitat.