



## Comments on PA 3252/19 “Relocation of existing Savina fuel station in Victoria, Gozo (License No. MRA/K-PRS26) with a new fuel station in Birżebbuġa, Malta”

15th July 2019

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As a reaction on consultation for development PA 3252/19 “Relocation of existing Savina fuel station in Victoria, Gozo with a new fuel station in Birżebbuġa” BirdLife Malta would like to provide the below feedback to be considered for drafting the Terms of References of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

As the Fuel Service Station Policy (2015) is currently still under review, we are of the strong opinion that any decision over a fuel or service station application currently under review needs to be postponed until the new policy is in force, especially if proposed fuel stations are having an immediate impact on the natural environment due to proposed locations in the Outside Development Zone (ODZ), on agricultural land or otherwise contradictive to environmental constraints. For these very reasons, **BirdLife Malta has already registered itself as an objector to the proposed developed by filing a representation to the planning application.**

Further to the Project Description Statement, we would like to comment as follows:

- The proposed development does not comply with the the Fuel Service Station Policy (FSSP, 2015) on various accounts:
  - o The planned development is proposed to be located on agricultural land, outside the Development Zone (ODZ), and therefore it is not compatible with the area context. Under Section 4.3 of the FSSP, the relocated fuel station “can be located in an ODZ area if it is considered that the community would benefit from the relocation and it does not create any adverse environmental impacts”. The operation of another fuel service station in the area will lead to an increase of traffic and consequently increased air pollutants in the area. Fuel spills can pose a serious threat to the soils, as the oil products have a negative impact on the humus layer composition. This needs to be fully considered in the EIA along with potential traffic impacts. The benefit such a development will bring to the community is questionable.
  - o According to the proposed Fuel Service Station Policy, fuel stations cannot be erected on land that can be used for agricultural purposes. Taking into account that most of the surrounding area is agricultural fields, the change of land use is not desirable. Also, section 4.3 states that the developer should take measures not to intrude further into the ODZ. There is no justification to take up more agricultural land for another petrol station in the proposed area.



- In addition to the before mentioned points:
  - o The proposed scheme foresees a considerable expansion of the existing fuel station which therefore will lead to increase of its footprint. Particularly, the planned development includes a refueling area, facilities for car washing and maintenance, class 4D shop, two reservoirs, toilet and a parking area while the existing fuel station in Victoria is no more than a kerbside one-pump point and the proposed fuel station will have a footprint of 3000 m<sup>2</sup>.
  - o Under the proposed FSSP policy currently drafted, the total footprint of newly developed fuel station shall not exceed 1000m<sup>2</sup>, while as mentioned before the planned development is proposed to occupy 3000m<sup>2</sup>.
  - o The development is located oddly along the confines of existing boundary walls, leaving an isolated plot of agricultural land between the proposed site and a secondary road. Such matters will inevitably lead to speculation of this land part, possibly with future development in mind, and a resulting uptake of land even greater than the proposed 3000m<sup>2</sup>.
  - o The development has only considered one alternative site at Xagħra, Gozo, which was the applicant's primary choice. This proposal was refused by reason of exceeding the permissible maximum site area, so it is unclear why such a consideration should be looked at favourably elsewhere. A proper alternative site exercise would have looked at the possibility of locating land which is already committed to other development and which would comply with FSSP on the criteria highlighted above.
  - o The planned development adjoins to Hal Far Industrial estate policy area, while it must be noticed that according to Marsaxlokk local plan the further expansion of development outside the Hal Far zone (to the north) shall be refused to avoid subsequent negative impact on natural environment.
  - o The planned development will invariably generate more traffic through and to the site. A traffic impact assessment needs to be considered as part of the EIA exercise to gauge traffic during construction and operational phases of the development, as well as assess if current road infrastructure is adequate, and if the location of such station will impact traffic flow.
  - o Additionally, it shall be stated that there is another fuel station in the locality, which is situated in less than 1 km distance from the proposed scheme, thus the necessity in constructing a new fuel station in the area is questionable as sufficient fuel supply in the area is provided.
  - o Although there are no protected areas within 100m distance from the scheme site, there are 3 nearby: 2 terrestrial habitats (within the distance of 230m and 350m respectively, one of them is a degraded steppe), and a Bird Sanctuary (within 580m distance) which potentially could be threatened by the station construction and operation (specifically in terms of light and noise pollution). The EIA should therefore look into the ecological impact of the development Also the question of trees currently present on the site and what will happen with them during the construction and/or operation phase should be included into the EIA.



- No light pollution impact on natural environment is mentioned, as well as no lighting scheme has been proposed. In terms of designing the lighting scheme it may be useful to refer to the *Best Practices for Effective Lighting (Bird-Friendly Developments Guidelines, Toronto Green Standard)*, according to which the glare should be minimized, spill light should be reduced and the colour temperature should be appropriate, so relevant changes in the proposed scheme must be made. Light pollution creates disturbance to the environment, can disrupt normal behavior of animal species and reduce habitat attractiveness. The EIA should specify the lighting scheme to be adopted in consideration of its impact on natural assets.
- Sealing the underlying soil of the proposed petrol station leads to further soil degradation, which is known as being a major threat of affecting fertile agricultural land, putting biodiversity at risk, increasing the risk of flooding and water scarcity as well as contributing to global warming. The proposed mitigation measures are insufficient to mitigate the negative effects of sealing on the soil functions in rural areas. As a side note, the European Commission's Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe (COM(2011) 571) proposes that by 2020, EU policies take into account their impacts on land use with the aim to achieve no net land take by 2050. European Commission departments have prepared Guidelines on best practice to limit, mitigate or compensate soil sealing (SWD(2012) 101 final/2) . The guidelines collect examples of policies, legislation, funding schemes, local planning tools, information campaigns and many other best practices implemented throughout the EU. These guidelines should be used to identify suitable mitigation measures to adequately compensate soil sealing.
- The PDS does not propose any mitigation measures in terms of land use change; no impacts on air quality during the operation phase are considered (such as contaminants release due to fuel evaporation and vehicles deceleration); threats to biodiversity (both during the excavation and operation phases) are not adequately taken into account and so no mitigation measures are proposed;