

News

It is about attracting tourism but keeping our spirit, authenticity and integrity intact – Fatima mayor



Incinerator will reduce emissions Environment Minister says

will generate, will be the first thing taken into consideration, apart from safety. Experts say we should hope to produce around 69,000 Mwh of energy. So between a beautiful plant producing 40,000 Mwh and a less beautiful one producing 70,000 Mwh I will go for the 70,000 Mwh. Efficiency is the primary consideration, but the aesthetics will be the second.

It's not going to be a 1970s incinerator looking like a dump with huge chimneys. Even if it is the cheapest on the planet, it would never be chosen as it is not somewhere hidden-away. Maghtab itself is ugly but the surrounding area is very beautiful.

What about smoke?

We are very lucky to be doing this in 2018. It will mostly be steam and white smoke. Since Malta is warm, even white smoke won't be that bad. The inconvenience in Maghtab at present is much worse: if I were living there I would appreciate this. The people there already have a problem. I won't be removing the problem, but I will be mitigating it, so they will be better off than they were. Obviously, ideally nobody would suffer any inconvenience, but what can you do?

Along with this project, you have also announced fines with regard to recycling and enforcement; how do you intend to do this?

We will be launching two bills – the Circular Economy Act and the Waste Abandonment Act – which will deal with dumping and pollution.

The Environment Act was drawn up more than 20 years ago, when priorities and exigencies were different and the deterrents were very poor. I come from a legal background and I believe in legal structures. I believe that, without the necessary penal deterrent, you will not get anywhere.

The dumping laws were very weak and so were prone to abuse. For example, if I were to dump a truck-load of rubbish in a valley, I would get a €50 fine. Do you think that such a fine is a deterrent for people dumping in valleys?

Valley management falls under my remit, and we are cleaning them up, two at a time. We have over 50 major valleys in Malta and the amount of dumping – the clogging of ancient waterways – is shocking. And the reason for this is because there is no deterrent. Most environmental offences had been

de-penalised and were being brought before the Commissioners of Justice. Now I've introduced new fines to go with such offences that will be dealt with before these Commissioners. For example, if someone puts out their rubbish on the wrong day, the first offence will be tried before a Commissioner. But if someone does something that causes considerable harm to the environment, the fines will be in the thousands of euros and magistrates will be able to order the confiscation of trucks and order the offender to clean up the area under a penalty of x amount of euros per day. So the penalties now are up to date – and I've also introduced vicarious liability.

The Waste Abandonment Act has been approved by the Cabinet and will shortly be presented for public consultation. It is a very comprehensive law and the other bill still needs to be put before the Cabinet.

Malta is one of the last countries to implement a Circular Economy Act. This will create an entity and with it I can create different waste schemes, such as the bottle-refund scheme and the way we treat animal waste, which will account for the 60 per cent through which we will recycle. This Act will create these avenues, in addition to

imposing the respective penalties for not adhering to the guidelines contained in the Circular Economy Act. So if you do not separate waste at source – for example, mixing plastic with other waste – you will be fined.

Up until now, the separation of waste was voluntary and we promoted it based on awareness and education, but only 12 per cent of people complied, which was not satisfactory. We need to have the right legal framework.

How do you intend to enforce this legislation?

There are two ways. Firstly, if you pass a law, the majority of people will adhere to it. Secondly, we are going to create an Enforcement Department within the ERA. There will be a Director-General for enforcement with a team of people employed from academia as well as enforcement officials.

Sometimes enforcement will be easy, such as in cases involving illegal dumping. On other occasions, enforcement will require sampling. When a person does not know when an inspector is coming to check on your activities, then that person will be more careful.

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