



THE MALTA CHAMBER

PRESS RELEASE

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Any Amendments to Planning Legislation, Rules and Policies should be part of a Holistic Reform – The Malta Chamber

Sporadic amendments will worsen the current state of play

The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry unequivocally expresses its deep concern on the piecemeal nature of Bill 143 and the judicial review undermining through Bill 144. These ad hoc changes defeat the purpose of comprehensive reform and instead foster a pick-and-choose approach. Despite repeated assurances from the authorities, the long-promised Strategic Plan for Environment & Development (SPED) review has not materialised. SPED 2015, already outdated, was due for review in 2020. Five years later, this essential process is still pending.

A holistic reform requires that:

- (i) all policies are aligned with a revised SPED
- (ii) all policies are clear and unambiguous, leaving no room for a 'pick and choose' approach, and
- (iii) it unequivocally determines which planning policies take precedence over others to prevent abuse, misinterpretation and misapplication of policies.

Weakens Participation and Civil Society Engagement

The proposed changes will make the appeals process less accessible and more costly for the public and civil society. The threat of fines acts as a deterrent, thereby weakening participation and civic engagement in matters of national importance. Furthermore, the basis on which one can object are being restricted.

Increases Political Interference

The new discretionary powers given to the Minister, the Planning Board and other organs within the Planning Authority introduce dangerous avenues for subjective interpretation on individual basis, thereby giving rise to lack of transparency, lack of cohesion, lack of clarity and lack of consistency.

Rewards Illegalities, Undermines Rule of Law

Once again, we are seeing the regularisation of illegal developments, which sends a message that flouting the rules pays off. This not only creates an unlevel playing field but undermines those who follow the rules from the start—a blow to ethical business practice, good governance, and long-term competitiveness.

Planning Must Be an Enabler, Not a Threat

If we truly believe in what we preach, Malta's planning regime must be an enabler of sustainable economic growth, not a source of clientelism, and inequality. The current approach has degraded our urban environment and natural environment, damaged our heritage, overstretched our infrastructure beyond its limit, and negatively impacted quality of life. This is not just a planning issue; it's a social, economic, and competitiveness issue which jeopardises attaining a well-being economy.

The Malta Chamber urges the Government to halt the current bills and engage in serious, transparent, and broad-based consultation that serves the national interest. This should be done even in view of the current open public consultation on Malta Vision 2050, whereby Government committed to sustainable master land development, citizen-centric urban planning, and preservation of heritage. The bills in question contradict the aspirations of Malta Vision 2050. One begs the question: if the public consultation on Malta Vision 2050 is still open, how come Government is introducing legislative amendments on one of the most important aspects of the Vision without any proper consultation?

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