

Press Release 12 June 2010

Now that the dust seems to have settled in the debate on the Delimara Power Station extension (DPSE), the undersigned NGOs are seriously concerned that there are still potentially serious environmental problems which have not been properly tackled.

The Power Station working on Heavy Fuel Oil will generate some 30 tonnes a day of hazardous waste from the clean-up of its chimney gases. The claim that this 'hazardous' waste is merely an irritant is incorrect. Although a minor component of the waste, the particulate matter from the engines still contains heavy metals like Vanadium and Nickel abundant in Heavy Fuel Oil, in addition to the Poly-aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) carcinogens common in 'diesel engine' exhaust. That imposes strict conditions on the collection, storage and transportation of the waste. The intention to transport the waste by road to the Freeport will increase heavy traffic passing through Marsaxlokk and Birzebbugia, and expose residents to toxic emissions from the heavy emission of particulates with PAH from the container truck exhausts.

Aside from the solid waste, the plant will produce about 1 tonne per day of Heavy Fuel Oil sludge, which cannot be burnt by its engines. The Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) had suggested that this be burnt in the Marsa incinerator. When MEPA heard of the proposal at the Delimara Power Station hearing it ruled out this option as the Marsa incinerator does not have an IPPC permit to burn Heavy Fuel Oil sludge. Enemalta had NOT included the sludge as a separate item in the application to MEPA for an IPPC permit, and MEPA had 'assumed' that the sludge could be disposed of with the other hazardous waste. As the physical and chemical nature of the sludge is very different from that of the other waste, and as the Environment Director must have read the EIA, this 'assumption' by MEPA represents a serious dereliction of duty, with potentially serious environmental and public health consequences.

The NGOs insist that this problem of sludge disposal be tackled immediately by the authorities and the public be informed of the proposed solution. There must not be a repeat of the 'black dust' charade, where MEPA, waking up from a four-year sleep to find Enemalta sending Marsa fly ash to an unlicensed quarry, summarily stopped the transfer. This meant that as soon as the Marsa ash store was full, Enemalta switched off the Marsa precipitators, showering the surrounding areas with 200 tonnes of hazardous fly ash. Enemalta, MEPA, and the authorities concerned then claimed that the source of the resultant latest dust plague was difficult to establish. When the cover was blown, the ultimate defence of MEPA was that it could not object to the switching off of the filters, as Marsa was not working under an IPPC permit at the time. MEPA had forgotten to issue one.

In spite of these problems, the authorities are still refusing to seriously consider using diesel (gasoil) rather than Heavy Fuel Oil as fuel for the DPSE. They do not even have an agreed figure for the diesel-HFO difference in the cost of a unit, when all savings have been taken into account: Enemalta says 24%, Minister Fenech says 30%. Minister Fenech has repeatedly asserted that the use of diesel would result in an immediate rise of 30% in electricity bills. That is completely wrong. With Marsa switched off, the DPSE working flat out will provide less than half our needs. That means that the average cost of a unit will go up by 15% at most and not by 30%. If one accepts the Enemalta figure for the diesel 'surcharge' the increase will come down to 12%. That figure can probably be cut down further, and will also be offset by lower pollution-related healthcare costs. We suggest that the decent option in the public interest is for Enemalta to go for a diesel-fuelled power station extension at Delimara. The nation's health calls for nothing less.

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