

Diving Master Plan for Malta

Dive Site Report 4: Mini Blue Hole Marsaskala

Version 1: December 2010

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Quality Assurance

Diving Master Plan for Malta Dive Site Report 4: Mini Blue Hole (Marsaskala) December 2010

Report for: **Malta Tourism Authority**

Revision Schedule

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DIVE SITE REPORT 4: MINI BLUE HOLE (MARSASKALA)

INTRODUCTION

- I. The Mini Blue Hole is a feature located along the shoreline, 700m away from the National Pool at Zonqor Point, see **Figure 1**. The Mini Blue Hole (see **Figure 2**) is linked to an underwater tunnel that is accessible a few metres away from the entry point. The site is located within the Locality of Marsaskala in an area between Ghar id-Duhhan and Iz-Zellieqa.

Figure 1: Location of site



Figure 2: The mini blue hole



DESCRIPTION OF SITE

Access

2. The dive site is accessible from an off-road track. This coastal track connects Marsaskala to Xghajra.
3. There is one access point to the dive site. From the informal parking area, there is a rough walking track over uneven rocks down to the shoreline. Access to the sea is over some gently sloping rocks (see **Figure 3**).

Figure 3: Access point E1



Land use

4. The surrounding area consists of bare rocks on the eastern side of the access road; abandoned fields give way to tilled land on the western side of the access road. A gun post is located approximately 230m to the northwest of the site. On-street parking is available.
5. The nearest residences are found 330m to the southwest of the site. Food and beverage outlets and a dive centre are located at Zonqor Point.
6. See **Figure 4** for a land use map of this site.

Planning and Environmental constraints

Site Usage

7. In 2005, a survey carried out by Adi Associates among dive schools did not identify any usage patterns at this dive site.
8. Based on the online questionnaire undertaken for this Master Plan, Mini Blue Hole - Marsaskala was ranked overall the 42th most popular dive. Mini Blue Hole ranked the seventh in cave diving experience, see **Table I**.

Table I: Rankings for Mini Blue Hole - Marsaskala

Overall popularity		42 nd	
Overall shore dive	28 th	Overall dive experience	42 nd
Novice divers	43 rd	Experienced divers	40 th
Best wreck dive	31 st	Best technical dive	36 th
Best cave dive	7 th	Best marine life	24 th

Existing facilities

9. The site itself does not offer any diving-related facilities. Although informal parking is available, there is a long walk over uneven rocks to the access point. Food and beverage outlets, a dive centre and public toilets are located 700m away from the site. A police station and fuel filling stations are located further away.
10. The entry point is located more than 70m away from the informal on-street parking area. Divers need to walk over gently sloping uneven rock to reach the access point. The access point itself consists of sharp rocks sloping into the sea.
11. The site condition is generally acceptable, with very little waste encountered during the site inspection.
12. A few hazards exist on site, mainly in the form of uneven walking surfaces and sharp rocks.
13. See **Figure 4** for a map showing the existing facilities on site.
14. Further details on this dive site are available in the Data Card in **Annex I**.

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS

15. Some interventions are required at this site to improve it for diving purposes. Most measures seek to improve accessibility to the site and to introduce new basic infrastructure. It must be emphasised that most dive-related facilities can double-up for use by other recreational users, e.g. swimmers, hikers, etc. The proposed interventions are shown in **Figure 5** and include:
 - Provision of a new ladder;
 - Provision of signage; and
 - Upgrading of the access road.

Figure 4: Existing facilities

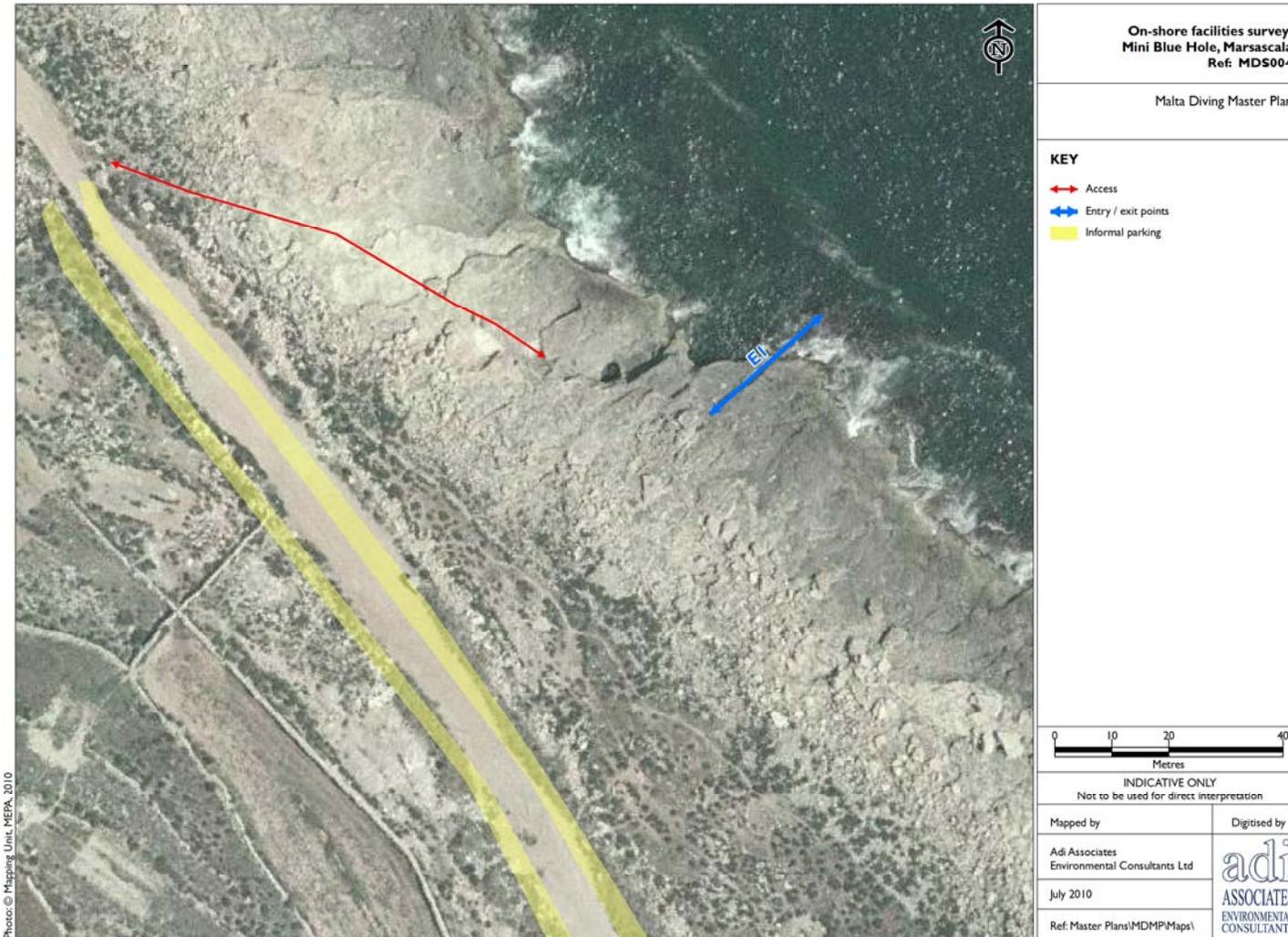
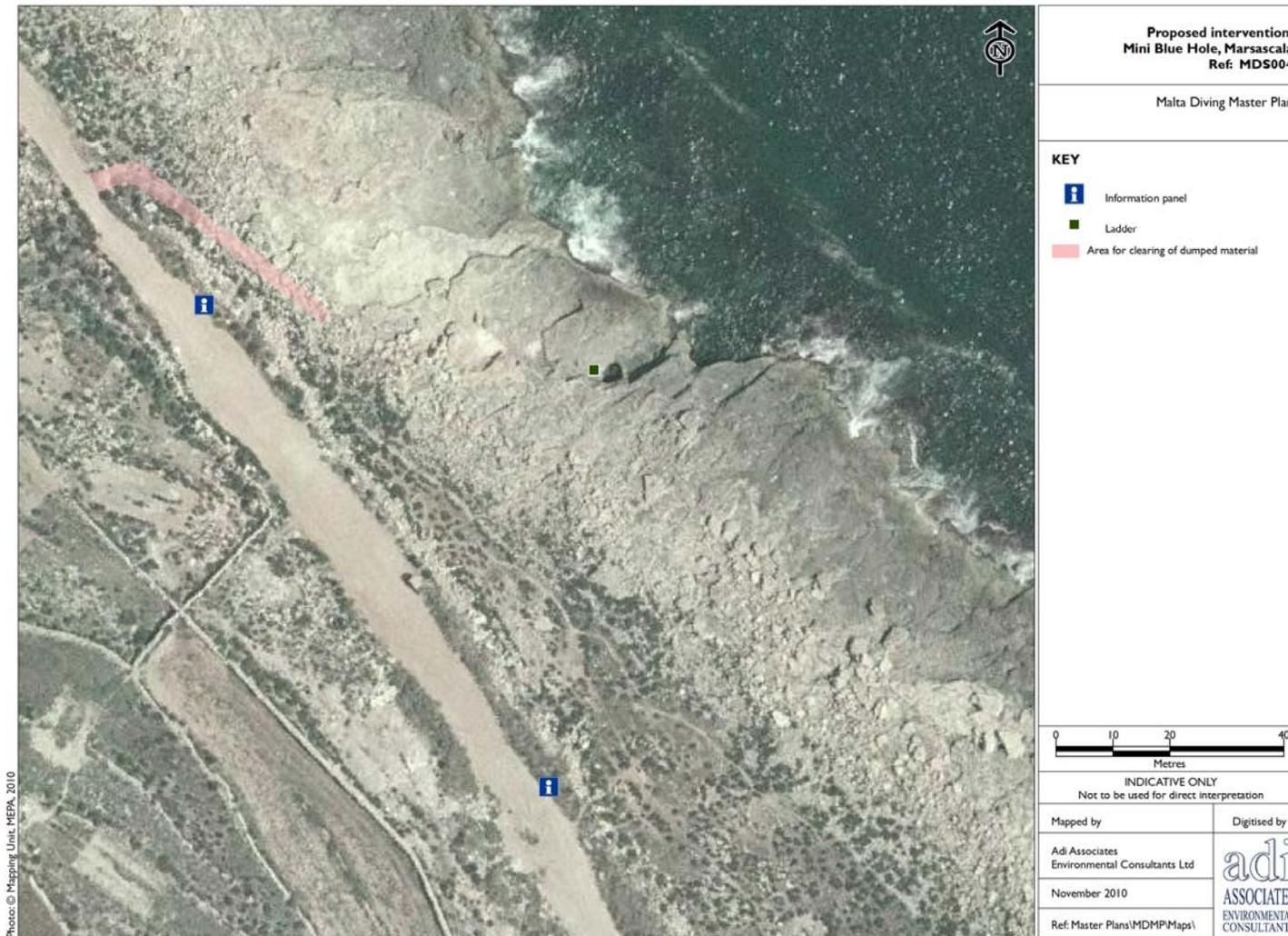


Figure 5: Proposed interventions



Permit requirements

16. The entire list of interventions required to upgrade this Dive Site is reproduced in **Table 2** below. The locations for the proposed interventions are shown in **Figure 5**. Detailed engineering proposals, complete with drawings, are outside the scope of this Master Plan but will be required before specific interventions are implemented.
17. Although the locations of the proposed interventions are not covered by specific habitat designations, this part of the coastline to the north of Marsaskala accommodates a Grade I Scheduled ex military feature (known as the Entrenchments between Rikasoli to Ras iz-Zonqor) as identified in **Figure 6** below.
18. The entire proposed infrastructure is likely to require notification to MEPA through DNO procedures as the proposed works are all ODZ and some works are proposed at the Scheduled Entrenchments. Subject to MEPA's agreement, a number of these proposals may be allowed through this process. **Table 2** identifies the permissions required for the various interventions proposed.

Table 2: Permit requirements

Reference	Intervention	Permits required
EI	New stainless steel ladder	DNO Required, leading to possible DPA. Why? – The ladder would be situated on a naturally rocky surface (Class 4 – 1(1)(i)(c) and is ODZ (Class 4 - 1(1)(2) of the DNO).
General	Removal of illegally dumped materials from informal footpath between vehicle track and ladder/entry point	DNO Required, leading to possible DPA. Why? - Class 3(2)(iii) of the DNO – Access track traverses part of the Grade I Scheduled Entrenchments from Rikasoli to Ras iz-Zonqor.
	Install some signage and information panels	DNO Required, leading to possible DPA. Why? – The signage would be located on or close to the Grade I Scheduled Entrenchments from Rikasoli to Ras iz-Zonqor and the location of the proposed signage is ODZ (Class 4 - 2 of the DNO).

Simplification of procedures

19. The need for DNO and DPAs for minor infrastructure is evident at this and many other dive sites. One of the recommendations of the Diving Master Plan for Malta is that dive sites are formally designated in order to recognise the importance they provide for the diving community and the need to ensure that potentially ecologically damaging activities are controlled at these locations. The benefits of formal designation are that their status can be acknowledged in the context of:
 - Local Plans;
 - Environmental Monitoring Plans for Marine Protection Areas (as required through the Habitats Directive);
 - The Marine Strategy Framework Directive; and

- The Water Framework Directive.
20. The Master Plan recommends that MTA seek amendments to the DNO to allow for a simplification of procedures for genuine diving related infrastructure, once dive sites are designated.

Timing and Priorities

21. The priorities set out below are specific for this dive site. Before implementing any interventions, the current popularity and the potential of the dive site need to be considered so that precedence is given to the highest ranking sites.
22. Interventions are needed to increase the level of accessibility to the site. The interventions are prioritised in **Table 3**.
23. The priority ranking is based on the importance of the intervention in providing:
- A safe and hazard-free environment;
 - Improved facilities that would facilitate the sport and enhance the diving experience; and
 - An improved and visibly upgraded environment.

Table 3: Prioritised interventions

Reference	Intervention	Priority
EI	New stainless steel ladder	Medium
General	Removal of illegally dumped materials from informal footpath between vehicle track and ladder/entry point	Medium
	Install some signage and information panels	Low

Figure 6: Plan showing scheduled property in the vicinity of the proposed interventions



Photo: © Mapping Unit, MEPA, 2010

CONCLUSION

24. This report has outlined the interventions required to upgrade the onshore facilities at the Mini Blue Hole Dive Site. These interventions would bring about a visible improvement to the Site; however, it must be pointed out that the approaches to the dive site (subject of this report) are only one aspect of the dive experience (albeit an important one that gives the tourist the first impression of the site). Equally important are the underwater environment and the quality of the dive itself.
25. The quality of the underwater environment can be improved by:
- Undertaking regular monitoring of the sea bed to identify interventions that need to be made;
 - Undertaking regular clean-ups of the sea bed (and providing adequate waste disposal containers on shore to promote safe and proper disposal of waste);
 - Establishing some form of management structure for the site (this can be amalgamated with other sites in the vicinity); and
 - Controlling fishing activity in the area.
26. It is also important that any new facilities provided are constructed of appropriate materials that can endure the harsh conditions of the marine environment, and that the facilities, and the general area, are regularly maintained to ensure that the efforts made are enjoyed in the long term. To this end, a maintenance programme that covers all the dive sites should be put in place and performance standards and criteria established to ensure that the right service is being delivered.

Annex I – Data card

MALTA DIVING MASTER PLAN*Inventory of Malta Dive Sites****On-Shore Facilities*****Ref. No.****MDS 004****Dive Site:** Mini Blue Hole**Locality:** Marsascala**Current Status:** NIL**Proposed Status:** Officially designated Dive Site**Nearest village:** Marsascala

Boat Dive	Shore Dive
	x

Distance to nearest village:	Within 500m	Within 1km	Within 2 km	Over 2 km
		x		

Distance to nearest Police Station:	Within 500m	Within 1km	Within 2 km	Over 2 km
				x

Distance to nearest Health Centre:	Within 500m	Within 1km	Within 2 km	Over 2 km
				x

Distance to nearest diving school / air filling station	Within 500m	Within 1km	Within 2 km	Over 2 km
		x		

Distance to nearest fuel / service station:	Within 500m	Within 1km	Within 2 km	Over 2 km
				x

Approach Roads:	Arterial Road	Distributor Road	Local Access Road	Other Road / Track	Off-road
					x

Parking Area:	Available	Formal	Informal	Dedicated parking spaces for divers	Against payment	Free of Charge
	x		x			x

Facilities available on site:	Telephone	Toilets	Showers	Life-saving post	First Aid Post	Site information

MALTA DIVING MASTER PLAN*Inventory of Malta Dive Sites**On-Shore Facilities**Ref. No.**MDS 004*

Telephones	On site	Within 100m	Within 500m	Within 1 km	Over 1 km
				x	

Mobile Reception	None	Poor	Intermittent	Good	Very Good
					x

Bars/Refreshments Areas:	On site	Within 100m	Within 500m	Within 1 km	Over 1 km
				x	

Security features on site:	

Site cleanliness:	Presence of tar residue	Animal waste	Small litter	Medium Litter	Large Litter

Mooring facilities:	None (anchoring)	Single point moorings	Tie-up buoys	Managed moorings	Pontoons	Quays
	x					

Suggested level of diving qualification / experience:	Beginner	Open Water	Advanced Open Water	Technical
		x		

Presence of On-shore Hazards:	Yes	No
	x	

Type of Hazard:	Sharp rocks	Slippery Surfaces	Uneven surfaces	Accumulated litter	Unsuitable structures	Other
			x			x

Hazard information	Long walk to dive site

Number (and name) of entry/exit points:	1	E1 – Reef

MALTA DIVING MASTER PLAN*Inventory of Malta Dive Sites****On-Shore Facilities*****Ref. No.****MDS 004****Entry/Exit Point:** E1 – Reef

Distance of parking area to entry point:	<5m	5-20m	21-40m	41-70m	71-100m	>100m
				x		

Access to water:	Stairs	Giant stride from Quay/Rock	Slope	Slipway	Ladder	Walkway	Rocks
			x				x

Exit Points:	Rocks	Rock-cut steps	Hand Rails	Slope	Slipway	Ladder	Steps
	x			x			