

Diving Master Plan for Malta

Dive Site Report 18: Merkanti Reef Paceville

Version 1: December 2010

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Quality Assurance

Diving Master Plan for Malta Dive Site Report 18: Mercanti Reef (Paceville) December 2010

Report for: Malta Tourism Authority

Revision Schedule

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CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Description of site	1
Access.....	1
Land use	2
Site Usage.....	3
Existing facilities.....	3
Proposed interventions	4
Permit requirements	9
Simplification of procedures	10
Timing and Priorities	10
Conclusion.....	15

FIGURES

Figure 1: Location of site.....	1
Figure 2: Access point E1 and E2.....	2
Figure 3: Parking facilities	3
Figure 4: Safety hazards.....	4
Figure 5: Existing facilities.....	5
Figure 6: Proposed interventions	7
Figure 7: Plan showing designated areas in the vicinity of the proposed interventions.....	13

TABLES

Table 1: Rankings for Merkanti Reef – Paceville	3
Table 2: Permit requirements	9
Table 3: Prioritised interventions.....	11

APPENDICES

Annex I – Data card

DIVE SITE REPORT 18: MERKANTI REEF (PACEVILLE)

INTRODUCTION

1. Merkanti Reef (Paceville) is found next to Dragonara Point in close vicinity to the hub of Maltese nightlife. The diving site is located offshore between the Portomaso development and the Westin Dragonara Resort. The Merkanti Reef dive site is located within the locality of St Julians (see **Figure 1**).

Figure 1: Location of site



DESCRIPTION OF SITE

Access

2. Merkanti Reef can be accessed from the road that leads from the Westin Dragonara Hotel to the Hilton Hotel. There are three entry points; two from the rocks and one from a ladder (see **Figure 2**).

Figure 2: Access point E1 and E2



Land use

3. The surrounding area is mainly known for its tourist and recreational facilities. There are also various bathing facilities and related infrastructure in the surrounding area. This is also evident in the landscaping present
4. The area has ample parking space. There are both informal and formal arrangements. The parking area immediately near the access / exit points is small and free of charge. The larger parking area located within an excavated plot is against payment and is the parking area of the adjacent hotel complex.
5. There is informational signage and various food and beverage outlets within walking distance.

Site Usage

6. In 2005, a survey carried out by Adi Associates revealed that Merkanti Reef was the 26th most popular dive site in Malta.
7. Based on the online questionnaire undertaken for the Master Plan, Merkanti Reef – Paceville was ranked overall the 30th most popular dive, see **Table I**.

Table I: Rankings for Merkanti Reef – Paceville

Overall popularity		30 th	
Overall shore dive	22 nd	Overall dive experience	33 rd
Novice divers	12 th	Experienced divers	42 nd
Best wreck dive	33 rd	Best technical dive	17 th
Best cave dive	38 th	Best marine life	41 st

Existing facilities

8. The site does not offer many facilities for divers; however, the informal parking area is just 20m away from the access points (See **Figure 3**). Apart from the uneven surfaces there are other safety hazards mainly through scattered broken glass and a broken rusted pipe (see **Figure 3**). The nearest fuel filling station is found at Balluta, more than 2km away from the site. The closest dive centres are located at the Westin Dragonara Resort and the Hilton Hotel.

Figure 3: Parking facilities



Figure 4: Safety hazards



9. Entry points E1 and E2 are located over bare rock whilst E3 is a ladder.
10. Large quantities of litter were encountered during site investigations.
11. **Figure 5** shows the location of the existing facilities.
12. Further details on this dive site are available in the Data Card in **Annex I**.

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS

13. Some minor interventions are required at this site to improve it for diving purposes. Most measures seek to remove hazards and improve safety and security, or to replace existing infrastructure with proper diver-friendly facilities. It must be emphasised that most dive-related facilities can double-up for use by other recreational users, e.g. swimmers, etc. The proposed interventions are shown in **Figure 6** and include:
 - Provision of a kitting-up area;
 - Provision of signage in the area; and
 - Provision of an area for loading / unloading.

Figure 5: Existing facilities

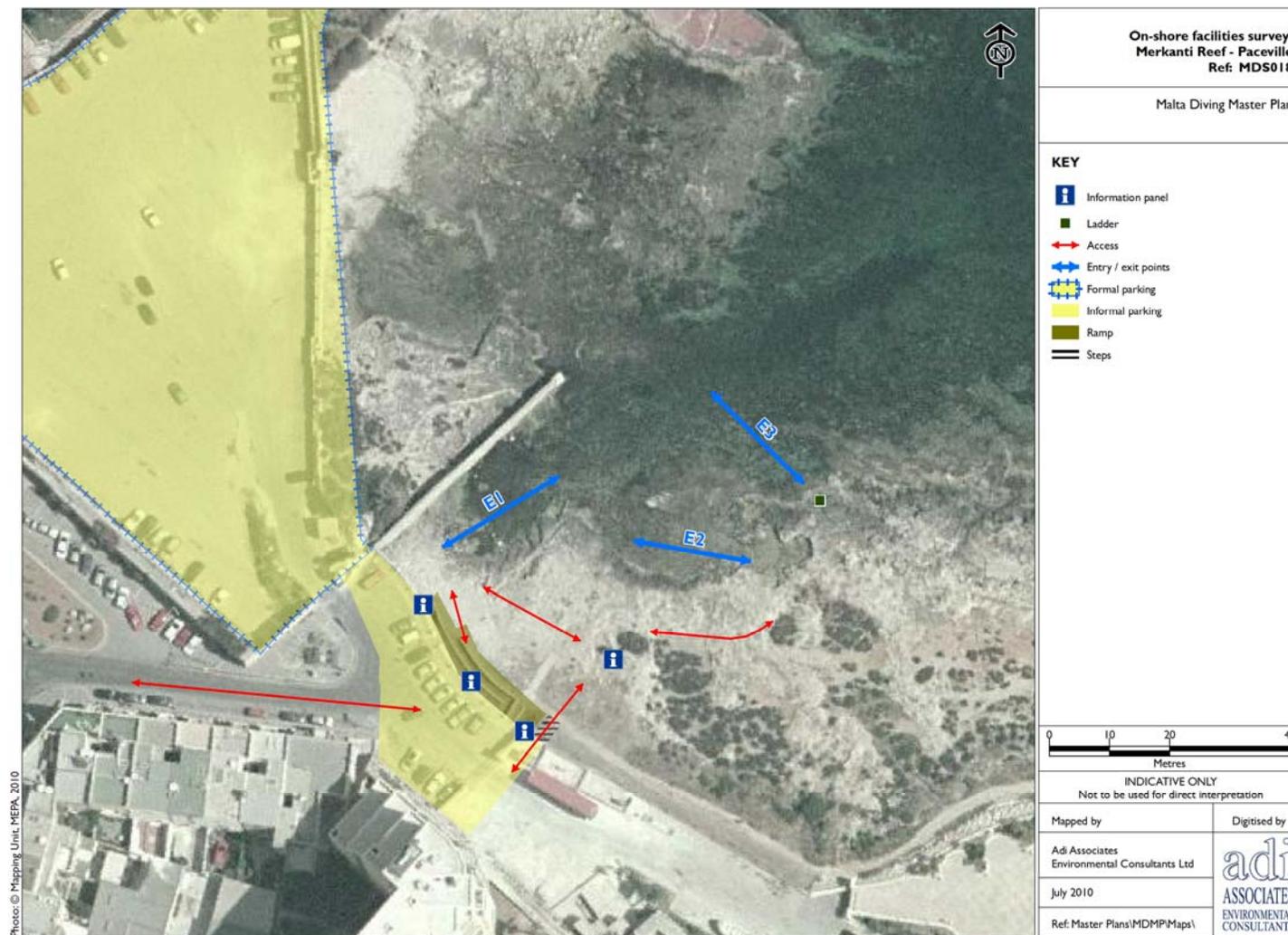
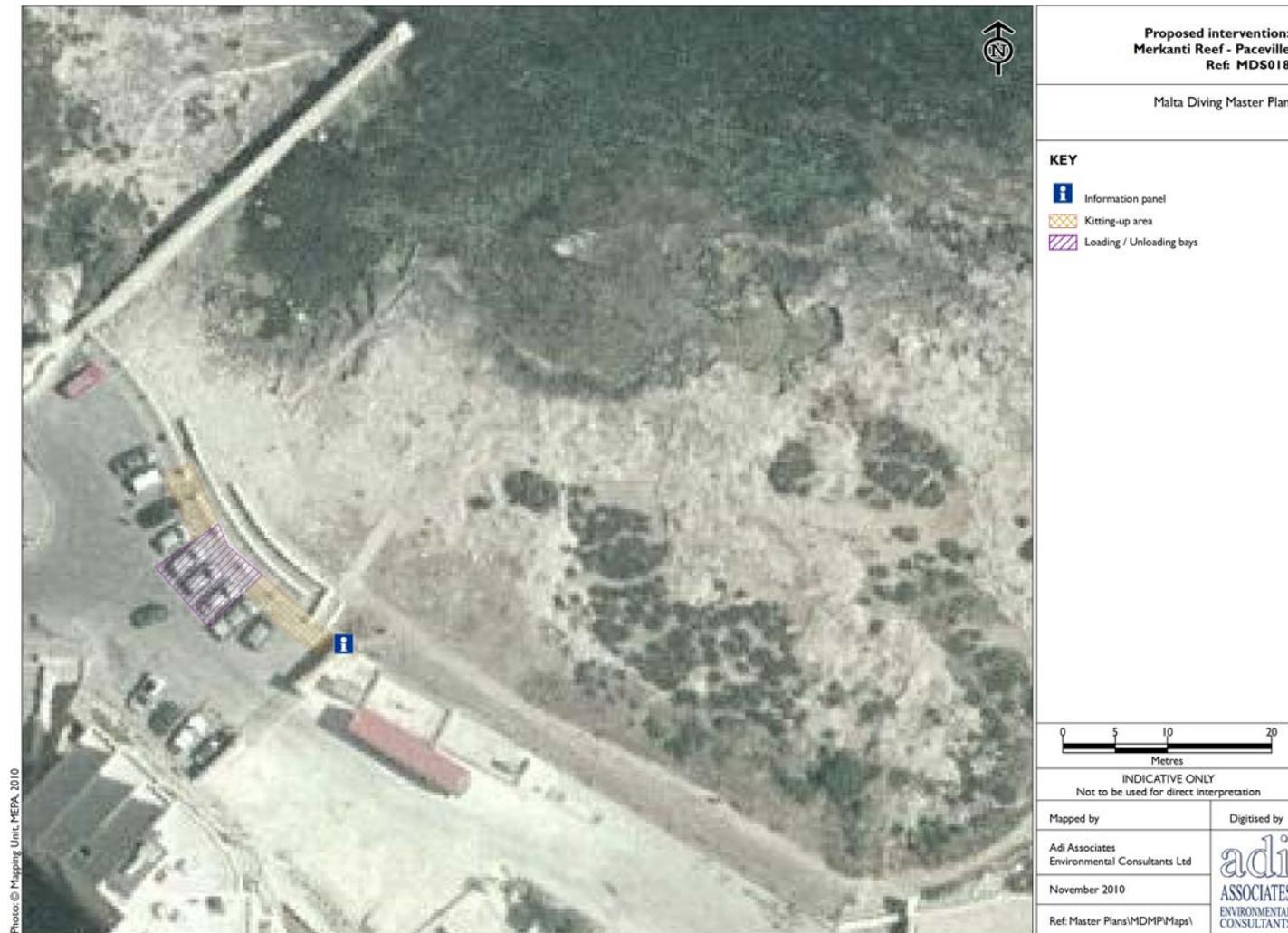


Figure 6: Proposed interventions



Permit requirements

14. 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 6**. Detailed engineering proposals, complete with drawings, are outside the scope of this Master Plan but will be required before specific interventions are implemented.
15. Although most of these are minor interventions that directly link to the dive site *per se*, most are subject to the Development Notification Order (DNO) process because they fall within a designated Level 3 Area of Ecological Importance (AEI) which is a buffer zone to the Freshwater Wetland at Il-Qaliet. Policy NHCV03 of the North Harbours Local Plan seeks to protect the area for coastal access:

NHCV03 Protection of the Coast and the Marine Conservation Area

Within the designated natural coastal areas as indicated in the relevant Area Policy Maps, no urban development will be permitted. In addition, all efforts will be made in order to retain or reinstate these designated areas in their natural state. MEPA will however consider;

i. Minor interventions on the natural coastal areas that are required in order to provide for necessary access for sea craft, provided that such interventions do not detract from the character of the designated natural coastal areas; and

ii. Minor interventions that would improve public access and use of the coast provided that these interventions are of a temporary nature, are totally reversible, and provided that they do not detract from the character of the designated natural coastal areas.

Furthermore, development that may result in damage or loss of coastal/marine habitats or species, and/or of cultural, natural or other important features will not be permitted within the coastal zone or in a location likely to negatively affect the Marine Conservation Area candidate site as identified through the Structure Plan.

16. Although the proposed interventions are unlikely to require a full Development Planning Application, they are considered to complement this NHLP policy.
17. **Table 2** identifies the permissions required for the various interventions proposed.

Table 2: Permit requirements

Reference	Intervention	Permits required
EI	Provision of an area for loading / unloading.	None. Management arrangements for a vehicle loading/unloading area reserved for use by divers is to be negotiated with between MTA/Dive Schools and Transport Malta.

General	Provision of a kitting-up area.	DNO Required, leading to possible DPA. Why? – The benches would be located on or close to a designated AEI and the location of the proposed signage is ODZ (As specified in Class 4 of the DNO).
	Provide appropriate signage and interpretation panels with information on the dive site, the underwater attractions, typical marine life encountered, other environmental information, safety rules, and important contact numbers.	Ditto above.

Simplification of procedures

18. 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 dive community and the need to ensure 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.
19. 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

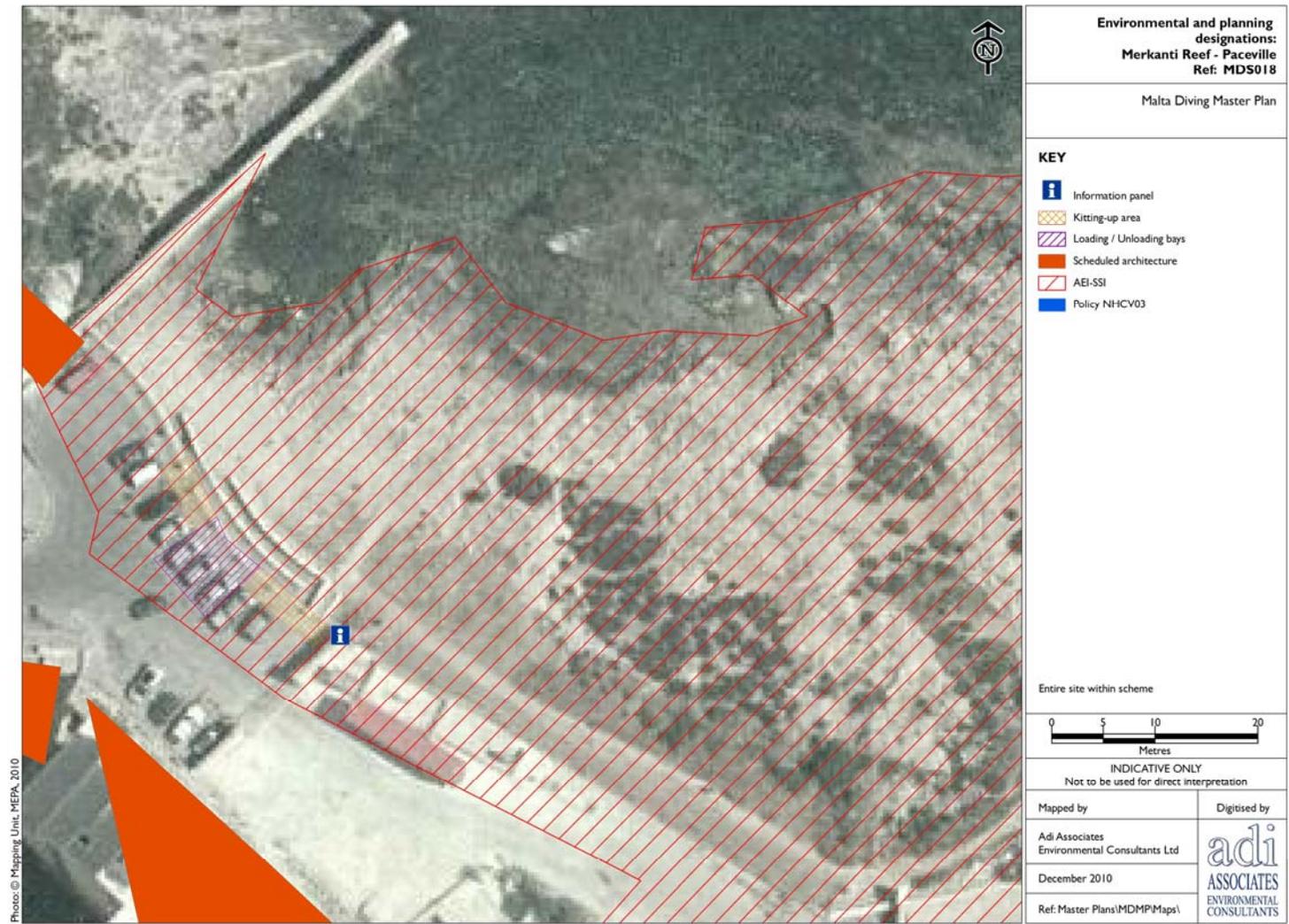
20. The priorities set out below are specific for this dive site. Before implementing any interventions, the current popularity and the potential of the dive site need to be considered so that precedence is given to the highest ranking sites.
21. Since most of the interventions proposed do not require permission, they can be carried out immediately. The interventions are prioritised in **Table 3**.
22. 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	Provision of an area for loading / unloading.	Low
General	Provision of a kitting-up area	Low
	Introduction of signage	Medium

Figure 7: Plan showing designated areas in the vicinity of the proposed interventions



CONCLUSION

23. This report has outlined the interventions required to upgrade the onshore facilities for the Merkanti Reef 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.
24. 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.
25. 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 018

Dive Site: Mercanti Reef - Paceville

Locality: St. Julian's

Current Status: NIL

Proposed Status: Officially designated Dive Site

Nearest village: Paceville/San Giljan

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		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 018

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

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			

Hazard information	The main hazard was shattered glass. Large quantities of this broken glass were spread throughout the area. There was also a steel rusted pipe.				
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Number (and name) of entry/exit points:	3	E1 – Wall access/exit point
		E2 – Rocks/Pool access/exit point
		E3 – Ladder access/exit point

MALTA DIVING MASTER PLAN

Inventory of Malta Dive Sites

On-Shore Facilities

Ref. No.

MDS 018

Entry/Exit Point: E1 – Wall access/exit point

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		x			

Entry/Exit Point: E2 – Rocks/Pool access/exit point

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

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

Entry/Exit Point: E3 – Ladder access/exit point

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		

MALTA DIVING MASTER PLAN

Inventory of Malta Dive Sites

On-Shore Facilities

Ref. No.

MDS 018

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