

## **Diving Master Plan for Malta**

### **Dive Site Report I: HMS Maori Il-Fossa, Marsamxett Harbour Valletta**

**Version I: December 2010**

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**Report Reference:**

**Adi Associates Environmental Consultants Ltd, 2010. Diving Master Plan for Malta, Dive Site Report I: HMS Maori – Marsamxett Harbour (Valletta). San Gwann, December 2010; v + 13pp + I Appendix.**

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## Quality Assurance

### Diving Master Plan for Malta Dive Site Report I: HMS Maori - Marsamxett Harbour (Valletta) December 2010

Report for: **Malta Tourism Authority**

### Revision Schedule

Rev	Date	Details	Surveys by:	Report Authored by:	Approved by:
00	Dec 2010	Submission to Client	<b>Andrea Pace, Yury Zammit</b>	<b>Yury Zammit</b> Junior Consultant	<b>Adrian Mallia</b> Managing Director

File ref: F:\ADI\Master Plans\Malta Diving Master Plan\Dive Site Reports\Report I - HMS Maori.doc



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# DIVE SITE REPORT I: HMS MAORI (MARSAMXETT HARBOUR)

## INTRODUCTION

1. The HMS Maori is a 1937 Tribal Class British Destroyer that was hit during World War Two. The destroyer originally sank in the Grand Harbour but was then floated, towed and scuttled in its present location<sup>1</sup>. The wreck is found buried in sand 120m away from the shoreline in an area known as Il-Fossa or St Elmo Bay, to the south of the entrance to Marsamxett Harbour (see **Figure 1**). It is located within the Locality of Valletta.

**Figure 1: Location of site**



## DESCRIPTION OF SITE

### Access

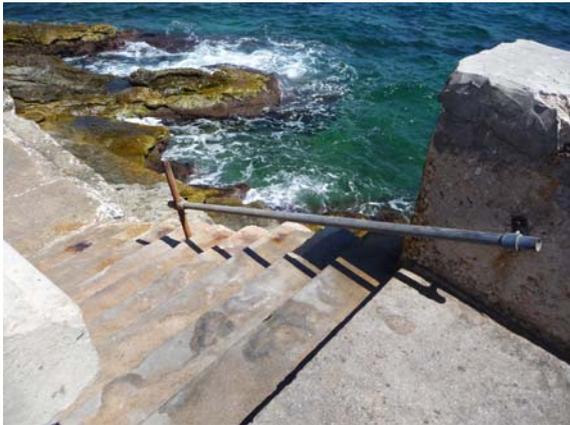
2. Access to the site from land is from the shoreline beneath is-Sur tal-Inglizi / is-Sur tal-Francizi. The shoreline is accessible from a road beneath the Valletta bastions that starts below the Mandragg area and ends at the tip of the peninsula, beneath Fort St Elmo. There are two access points to this road, one from a tunnel under Great Siege

<sup>1</sup> Lemon, P., 2008, Scuba Diving – Malta, Gozo, Comino, Malta.

Road and another through a tunnel beneath St Sebastian's Road. The latter is the closest to the dive site.

3. There are two access points to the dive site. The first (E1) is down concrete steps and over a concrete platform towards some rocks. Parts of the concrete surface and the rocks are very slippery. Steel railings are in place to help bathers and divers enter / exit the water. The railings are rather rusty; some are damaged (see **Figure 2**).

**Figure 2: Access point E1**



4. The second access (E2) is located beyond an informal parking area. A footpath over the rocks leads to the shoreline where one can access the sea using ladders or over a gentle slope (see **Figure 3**).

**Figure 3: Access point E2**



### Land use

5. The surrounding area is mainly used for car parking. The road along the shoreline is commonly lined with parked cars, mostly owned by people working in Valletta. An informal car park is located close to the dive site access point. This is heavily used, which makes parking for diving-related vehicles a problem (see **Figure 4**).
6. Two bars / restaurants are located close to the site.

7. A number of boathouses, garages and *summer rooms* are found behind the food and beverage outlets and beneath is-Sur tal-Francizi. A narrow man-made *canal*, formed following the construction of the sea wall, is used to launch (through a slipway), as well as shelter, small fishing boats.
8. Apart from diving, the area is also used for shore angling and for swimming.

**Figure 4: The informal parking area**



9. See **Figure 5** for the existing facilities at this site. Proposed interventions to upgrade the diving product in this area are shown in **Figure 6**. The main rationale here is to provide a new entry point further along the St Elmo Bastions where dedicated parking for dive trucks can be provided. This would help minimise conflicts between the dive trucks and other cars parked in the area and ease the congestion that is a regular feature at this site. Having a dedicated parking area for the dive trucks while providing an equivalent entry point to those used currently, may also allow the provision of better security facilities to deter theft.

**Figure 5: Existing facilities**



**Figure 6: Proposed interventions**



## Environmental and Planning constraints

### Site Usage

10. In 2005, a survey carried out by Adi Associates revealed that this dive site was the fifth most popular diving attraction in Malta.
11. Based on the online questionnaire undertaken for this Master Plan, HMS Maori, St Elmo Bay was ranked overall the 8<sup>th</sup> most popular dive. The dive site ranked first when it comes to novice divers and ranked 6<sup>th</sup> for marine life, see **Table I**.
12. The wreck has degraded over the years and is now mostly covered in sand.

**Table I: Rankings for HMS Maori, St. Elmo Bay - Valletta**

Overall popularity		8 <sup>th</sup>	
Overall shore dive	8 <sup>th</sup>	Overall dive experience	42 <sup>nd</sup>
Novice divers	1 <sup>st</sup>	Experienced divers	36 <sup>th</sup>
Best wreck dive	7 <sup>th</sup>	Best technical dive	17 <sup>th</sup>
Best cave dive	17 <sup>th</sup>	Best marine life	6 <sup>th</sup>

### Existing facilities

13. The site does not offer many diving-related facilities. Although food and beverage outlets and informal parking are available on site, public telephones, a police station and fuel filling stations are located further away. The nearest dive centre is located in Gzira, more than 2 km away from the site.
14. The first entry point (rocks) is located within 5m of the on-street parking area and can be quite slippery. The hand rails are rather rusty and damaged (or missing) in some parts.
15. The second entry point (gentle slope / ladders) is located within 20m of the informal parking area and is an easy access point.
16. The site condition is generally acceptable, with only some small litter and animal waste encountered during the site inspection. Responses from divers however, indicate that both the shore and underwater areas are littered with rubbish. Provision of a few bins may help improve upon the situation as long as these are regularly serviced.
17. A major issue of concern is theft and vandalism. Diver vehicles are often targeted which as a result, requires leaving somebody on-shore to guard the vehicle. Security cameras that are in place are not functional anymore.
18. A few hazards exist on site, mainly in the form of slippery surfaces and rusted metal structures. These should be removed. Broken hand rails should be replaced.
19. Further details on this dive site are available in the Data Card in **Annex I**.

## PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS

20. A new entry / exit point is proposed, together with the relevant facilities, to address the current parking conflicts and ease congestion. The new access shall be located further along the St. Elmo Bastions and is shown as EI in **Figure 6**. Ancillary interventions include measures to increase security and provide safe access. 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 proper kitting-up area;
- Provision of dedicated parking for dive trucks;
- Provision of stainless steel handrails and replacement of current steel ladder with a new stainless steel version;
- Provision of signage;
- Fix road including light facilities to facilitate site usage for night diving; and
- Security features, including a CCTV camera in parking area.

### Permit requirements

21. Although the locations of the proposed interventions are not covered by specific habitat designations, the adjacent Fort St Elmo is a Grade I Scheduled structure (under Section 46 of the Development Planning Act). Similarly, the coastline of the Grand Harbour and its Fortifications area are also scheduled as an Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV). As well as being designated within an AHLV, the foreshore also falls within the Valletta Urban Conservation Area (UCA). **Figure 7** shows the curtilage of the scheduled Fort St Elmo in relation to the proposed interventions.
22. 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.
23. Subject to MEPA’s agreement, a number of these proposals may be allowed through the Development Notification Order (DNO) process. **Table 2** identifies the permissions required for the various interventions proposed.

**Table 2: Permit requirements**

Reference	Intervention	Permits required
EI	Installation of stainless steel handrails	<b>DNO Required leading to possible DPA if works deemed to required Planning Permission</b> Why? DNO Class 4 – RE: Proposed interventions are within Scheduled / designated areas or ODZ.
	Replacement of steel ladder with a stainless	As above.

Reference	Intervention	Permits required
	steel version	
<b>KI</b>	Construct kitting-up facilities	As above.
	Erect signage and interpretation panels	As above.
<b>PI</b>	Provide dedicated parking for divers.	<b>None.</b> Provided it does not entail direct or indirect damage to existing historical buildings or monuments, archaeological features include underground shelters, cisterns or water galleries, rubble walls and natural stone paving. As specified at DNO Class 3 (2) iii. MTA should contact TM and the Local Council to determine what regulatory procedures are necessary from a traffic management (rather than planning) perspective.
<b>General</b>	Install security cameras	<b>DNO Required, leading to possible DPA</b> Why? - Although surveillance equipment is normally permitted development, DNO Class 2(1) provides an exception in the case of surveillance equipment at scheduled property. The definition of 'scheduled' in the context of the DNO includes land identified as an Area of High Landscape Value. DNO is still required because it is proposed within an AHLV, within 30 metres of a scheduled property and ODZ.
	Provide bins	<b>DNO Required, leading to possible DPA</b> Why? - Normally permitted development that does not require DNO, however the proposed intervention is within 30 metres of a scheduled property (Class 3 (1)(3)).
	Lighting to facilitate site usage for night diving	<b>Development Notification Required.</b> CLASS 12 of LN 115/07 - Lighting of buildings, structures and roads. DNO required in areas that are ODZ, UCA, a designated area or within 30m of a Scheduled property.

### Simplification of procedures

24. 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 Quality Directive.

25. 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**

26. 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.
27. The interventions are prioritised in **Table 3**.
28. 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**

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Priority</b>
<b>EI</b>	Installation of stainless steel handrails	High
	Replacement of ladder with a stainless steel version	Medium
<b>KI</b>	Construct kitting up facilities	High
	Erect signage and interpretation panels	Medium
<b>PI</b>	Provide dedicated parking for divers.	High
<b>General</b>	Install security cameras	High
	Provide bins	Medium
	Lighting to facilitate site usage for night diving	High

**Figure 7: Planning designations in the vicinity of the proposed interventions**





## CONCLUSION

29. This report has outlined the interventions required to upgrade the onshore facilities at the HMS Maori 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 is the underwater environment and the quality of the dive itself.
30. 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.
31. 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 001

**Dive Site:** HMS Maori – St. Elmo Bay

**Locality:** Valletta

**Current Status:** NIL

**Proposed Status:** Officially designated Dive Site

**Nearest village:** Valletta

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 001

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
		x	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				x

Hazard information	Broken stairs and hand rails. Presence of rusted steel structures.					

Number (and name) of entry/exit points:	2	E1 – Near Cafe
		E2 – Ladder

**MALTA DIVING MASTER PLAN***Inventory of Malta Dive Sites***On-Shore Facilities****Ref. No.****MDS 001****Entry/Exit Point:** E1 – Near Cafe

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 – Ladder

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		x

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