

The Ramblers' Association of Malta

**ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT
FOR PERIOD 30 OCTOBER 2005 TO 31 JANUARY 2007**

There were thirteen committee meetings since the first Annual General Meeting of the Association held in these same premises on the 29th October 2005. During all of these meetings decisions were taken by general consensus after healthy argumentation and the need never occurred to take a vote. All meetings were held in the friendliest of terms between members all of who cooperated willingly with each other as the circumstances required. I consider this is a very healthy element in the character of the executive as a whole, that is in effect reflected in the bonhomie experienced in every one of the activities organised by the Association.

You will remember that during the last AGM there were fourteen nominations for eleven members to be elected, but three nominees generously decided to withdraw their name in favour of others in order to avoid the hassle of an election. The three members were subsequently co-opted according to the statute of the Association. It turned out to be a godsend because two members never turned up while Dr. Paul Micallef resigned after summer because of other commitments. The three co-opted members, having been nominated and approved by the AGM, assumed full membership in the committee as a consequential right.

The committee at once resolved to delegate the work to commissions created within it. This experiment met with varied success but was satisfactory on the whole as most commissions performed well. It is our YEAR ONE and I trust that improvements will be registered with experience. My view is given presumptuously but with full respect on the performance of each as follows:

- o The Environment Commission immediately started rambling successfully before it found its feet. As a consequence the Association is today falling victim of its lucrative activities. So much so it had to reluctantly restrict number of participants on many of the activities and walks.
- o The Legal Commission is also finding its way about the murky waters of recent new draft legislation regarding NGOs, belated definition of legal persons, foundations, etc., as well as lack of legislation regarding access and rights of way in the countryside.
- o The Education Commission is finding the going tough in making headway in practices that are bureaucratic, have been long established and not easy to penetrate.
- o The Finance Commission, with one social activity to its credit so far, still has to prove its salt in accessing other sources of funding.
- o It can be said that the Commission for International Relations has not taken off yet.

- o And it is too early in the day to say anything of the recently established Archaeology Commission except for one interesting scouting expedition.

That is my opinion. You will be hearing brief reports prepared by the heads of these commissions in due course.

The secretariat which includes the PRO Commission and which I head, is struggling to overcome the workload involved to organise the database, membership cards, voluminous renewals and new registrations for the increasing number of paid up members, which is very encouraging. At the same time it seeks to liaise with other NGOs on various issues picked up from time to time with the various Authorities and Government. Worthy of mention here is the summer protest in Valletta on the occasion of the infamous Rationalisation of Boundaries and the subsequent judicial protest recently instituted against the SEA Verification Team, MEPA and the Minister of Rural Affairs and the Environment. These initiatives have taken hours of effort, that was strenuous in its uncertainty. Contemporaneously the degrading situation of access to country paths continued to be thematic in the numerous meetings with various authorities from the Prime Minister down to the EU ambassador Dr Joanna Drake, though of no consequence at all in my opinion. At times all is so disheartening that one wonders what keeps one going. What with the ever increasing number of members; the satisfaction of experiencing so much delight from an increasing number of ramblers taking part in walks and accessing places where on their own they would not venture; the scores of emails and letters expressing encouragement and support of seemingly vain initiatives taken; and the positive response to the quarterly newsletter that is sent out to members and subscribers. It is indeed all this that keeps one going.

Moreover the secretariat keeps count of its lucky stars in that our good friend JC Sullivan gratuitously continues to take on the burden of managing the website with proficiency. Heartfelt thanks to Mr Sullivan for caring so much to provide sterling service from the heart that a fortune would never have bought.

Lest I forget, a prayer and a word of appreciation should go in the direction of our friend of yesteryear and leader of some of our walks, Amabile Agius, who is sadly missed. Let us trust that other leaders will come forward to replace his generous contribution in favour of Rambler friends.

To conclude I would point out that there are many lessons to be learnt from last year's experience, first and foremost of which is that focus be kept on the mission of the Association and sparse effort spent carefully thereon. A new enthusiastic organisation such as ours can easily be distracted by issues environmental that are hot and topical, alarming though they might as well be. Considering that work is voluntary and that volunteers are in short supply, it is counterproductive to take up more issues than can be managed, or issues out of scope of declared objectives. Frustration is symptomatic in dealing with

bureaucratic authority on any one issue, and can only be compounded to exhaustion and suicide by taking more issues at once.

My parting call then is for concentration of effort and consolidation of the working nucleus. In this respect it is with pleasure that I announce the co-option of Ms Anne Zammit to our team. Anne needs no introduction as her efforts in bringing up environmental concerns to the fore say it all loud and clear. May the Ramblers' Association of Malta be further enriched with environmentalists at heart giving up some of their spare time to the worthy cause that is RAM's mission!

For this reason may I sum up by thanking all members of the executive team for their positive working attitude! It was a pleasure working with you as much as it was marvellous learning your ways, in the beautiful Maltese countryside especially. Thanks also to the hundreds of ramblers who join us in the walks, and whose behaviour always astounds me and my fellow leaders in manners of civility and courtesy, making each walk a pleasant encounter. And the warmest thanks and appreciation especially to that unfortunately-smaller number of ramblers who heeded our call to stand to be counted when the need arose to civilly protest in safeguarding the very countryside that we thrive upon. May the need to make such calls never arise, but should it materialise, it is expected that the same number of ramblers that turned up at il-Maqluba will turn out then.

Alex Vella
Hon Secretary

1st February 2007.