In last Saturday's Talking Point, Mr. George Mifsud writes that "no objective line of reasoning may be offered before all the facts are presented" on the proposed site at Xaghra l-Ħamra to be developed into a golf course complex. He argues that "only a full Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) will supply the necessary information on which to base important decisions" and goes on to explain what constitutes an EIA worthy of the purpose for which it is set up – "to define the 'baseline' present situation (at Xaghra l-Ħamra) and then superimposes the picture showing the impact of the development" of a golf course with ancillary buildings and infrastructure.

But that is not the issue! What the NGOs are saying is simple: Why should Xaghra l-Ħamra undergo the EIA process when factual arguments so evidently manifest against its use? Is this not squandering public funds, when five other sites had originally (and certainly not whimsically) been preferred by MEPA? (MEPA is also duty bound to stick to its guns and stop this squandering.)

The NGOs are sensibly advising the developer to use public funds responsibly by considering two or more options of the five earmarked by MEPA itself, sites that prima facie present the least negative impact generally. Then, once these are identified, to draw up an EIA on each that makes possible a comparative study to determine which locality is best suited in terms of the socio-economic objectives vis-à-vis its opportunity cost. Not only was Xaghra l-Ħamra not short listed by MEPA but the site is the least suited and the NGOs, with such factual conviction and no other agenda except the protection of the natural heritage, will continue to strongly oppose the particular selection with all legal means at their disposal.

The NGOs go on to list the factual arguments that militate against the choice of Xaghra l-Ħamra:

- It comprises some of the most scenic open areas of our natural heritage;
- Its natural beauty will be destroyed forever by the ancillary (building) development and infrastructure required by a golf course;
- Its abundant flora and fauna will be adversely affected;
- It is not a degraded area, and can only be irreversibly damaged, certainly not improved upon;
- It lies on a drinking water safeguard zone;
- Its accessibility to the general public will be reduced;
- It infringes specific Structure Plan policies as well as the Draft NW Countryside policies;
- It borders a protected area (Special Conservation Area)
- It goes flagrantly against MEPA's own declared policies and plans.

Aware that this is the last chance to save a large sweep of pristine landscape in its natural beauty from the clutches of speculation, and in the hope that common sense will prevail for Government to revert to the proposals for a real

National Park in the North West, the NGOs call on government to reconsider its choice should it want to press ahead with the development of another golf course.

The officers at MTA should also know better than blindly to support the development of another golf course at the cost of Malta's high potential for eco-tourism, when there is room for both.