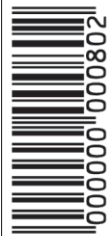




ANNA MALLIA - PG 14



MOUSE MAYHEM AT MATER DEI



Harvested in Belgium, frozen in Holland, then boiled and served in Malta: the mouse's head that sent shockwaves through Mater Dei

MATTHEW VELLA

THE severed head of a mouse that found its way into a staff member's salad at Mater Dei Hospital yesterday was the source of much amusement, and disbelief, as health authorities launched investigations into the origin of the decapitated rodent.

Hospital staff yesterday told MaltaToday how two midwives who turned up at the hospital canteen for their lunch on Monday had the fright of their lives when they found the head of the mouse, in one of the salads they were eating.

Quite akin to the infamous scene in Fawlty Towers, news spread like wildfire

of the mouse's head that had been apparently laid to rest in the chilled broad beans dish in the salad station at the canteen.

But despite the harrowing find, the canteen operated by Papillon Caterers was yesterday still allowed to open for business – albeit with nobody turning up for their free food, hospital sources told MaltaToday.

The catering company is contracted by the government to provide meals for hospital staff members.

The discovery of the mouse's head prompted an investigation by the Public Health Inspectorate to determine whether the mouse had been deliberately inserted into the salad, or whether it had

been packaged and cooked in Malta.

"We initially suspected it was an act of sabotage... if that was the case we would have got in forensics right away," a government source said.

The tests conducted by the health inspectorate, to determine the exact condition of the mouse's head, revealed that the dismembered part had already been harvested in the country of origin and arrived in a frozen packet to Malta.

But the head was then boiled by catering staff along with the broad beans, and unknowingly served to staff members.

Both the inspectorate and the hospital's infection control unit conducted an examination of the canteen and the serving dishes to assert whether any other

area had been contaminated by the stray rodent's head.

In a statement issued by the Parliamentary Secretariat for Health, a spokesperson said that tests showed the broad beans had been imported from Belgium and packed in the Netherlands. The inspectorate also informed the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed for immediate steps to be taken, and to investigate the batch on the European market.

The secretariat added that the inspectorate had made contact with the local supplier, inspected his store-rooms, and sealed the rest of the crates that came with the same batch. The inspectorate will be taking action against any person responsible at law.

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How four tuna cages became... 21

RAPHAEL VASSALLO

IT has a permit for four 50-metre cages for bluefin tuna, as well as eight smaller pens for sea-bream (*spnott*). But in reality, Azzopardi Fisheries' tuna fattening ranch in the Gozo channel, just south of Comino, possesses no fewer than 21 collar rings for tuna cages (i.e., empty cages without any nets) and zero pens for sea-bream... all allegedly in contravention of its original permit.

The Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA) yesterday sent enforcement officers to monitor reports that a licensed tuna ranch off the south coast of Comino has allegedly quadrupled its potential capacity – from a declared 800 metric tonnes to a staggering 3,500 – without any valid permit to cover this exten-

sion.

The enforcement officers were despatched on site after MaltaToday sent questions about apparent discrepancies between the farm's declared output and its visible capacity, based on a survey undertaken by international consultants ATRT/SL (Advanced Tuna Ranching Technologies) last week.

A MEPA spokesman eventually confirmed yesterday that the details of the planning permit bear little resemblance to the actual site: "Further to your query earlier today, kindly note that from our records there is a planning permit on this site, to substitute part of the breeding of sea-bream with tuna. The permit, which was issued on 5 February 2002, covers the operation for a fish farm with a maximum of 12 cages." **pg 5 >**

Melita offers different outlets that appeal to both young & old alike. The restaurant and pizzeria are enclosed in a tremendous glass atrium, so be it summer or winter you always feel like you are dining outside.

After a scrumptious meal, one can opt for a drink at the Mezzanin Wine Bar. Melita Gardens also boasts a cafeteria that is open all day.

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