

## MEPA AUDITOR'S BOMBSHELL:

# 'Chairman's appointment could be illegal'



Austin Walker's appointment as MEPA executive chairman could be illegal, according to MEPA's internal auditor

**JAMES DEBONO**

DECISIONS taken by the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA) in the past weeks could be challenged in Court because the current composition of the MEPA board might be in violation of the law, MEPA auditor Joe Falzon warns.

The planning authority's ombudsman is questioning the legality of Austin Walker's appointment as MEPA executive chairman, and that of Labour MP and MEPA employee Roderick Galdes as the Opposition's member on the MEPA board.

Falzon says the Development Planning Act prohibits employees of any public agency – such

as MEPA – from serving on the MEPA board, the highest decision-making organ in the authority.

Falzon has now asked the new MEPA chairman, Austin Walker, to seek the advice of the Attorney General regarding the legality of his "double role" as board chairman and an executive officer – a position which effectively makes him an employee of the Authority.

Falzon also expressed strong doubts on the appointment of Labour MP Roderick Galdes as the Opposition's representative on the MEPA board, who is also an employee of MEPA.

"The Development Planning Act makes it clear that any servant of a public agency cannot serve on the board. As MEPA

employees, both Galdes and the new MEPA chairman are servants of a public agency," Falzon told MaltaToday when contacted.

Falzon considers the implications of Walker's appointment as "executive chairman" even more serious than Galdes's, because the Labour MP's role only becomes vital when his presence is required to reach a quorum.

"Austin Walker's double role as chairman of the board and MEPA's full-time employee could expose him to a conflict of interest. Being responsible for all that happens within MEPA, he does not enter board meetings with a clean slate," Falzon contends.

MEPA's former chairman, Andrew **pg4 ▶**

## Brussels confirms irregularities on tuna farms

**RAPHAEL VASSALLO**

THE European Commission has confirmed allegations that Malta's tuna ranches are in breach of a number of regulations – including the double registration of one tuna ranch operator, and the declaration of two non-operational tuna farms – in a letter sent to Alternativa Demokratika (AD) yesterday.

On Tuesday 3 September, AD chairman Arnold Cassola requested the Commission's DG Mare to investigate allegations, published by MaltaToday the previous Sunday, that the Ministry

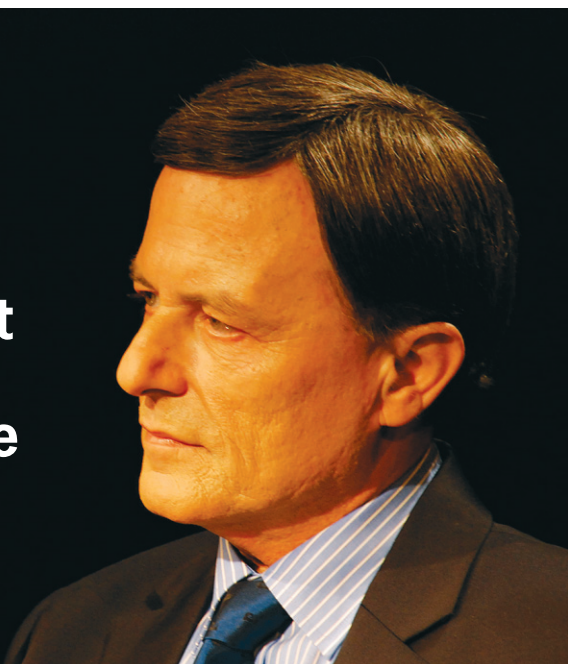
of Resources and Rural Affairs (MRRA) may have falsely declared the capacity of Maltese tuna ranches industry to the international tuna industry regulator, ICCAT.

MaltaToday revealed how Mediterranean Tuna Ltd, with a capacity of 350 metric tonnes, had been declared operational for every year since 1999 – despite the fact that the ranch has not physically existed since 2002. Also, the 1,500 tonne-capacity Deep Sea Aquaculture farm was listed as operational in April this year, although its licence officially expired last December.

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## ALFRED SANT TO TAKE 'POLITICAL SABBATICAL'

Joseph Muscat says former leader will take rest from parliamentary duties **Pg4 ▶**



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