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Auditor raps Pullicino for €1.2m direct order spend

MATTHEW VELLA

THE Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs is claiming it has respected procurement laws in spite of a scathing report by the Auditor General, which says George Pullicino's (pictured) ministry issued over €1.2 million in direct orders and consultancies that were not covered by agreements and that "procurement rules were not adhered to in the award of the contract."

In his report tabled in parliament this week, the Auditor listed a dozen instances where the ministry issued direct orders without finance ministry approval. And it paid €60,000 in services that were not covered by VAT receipts, going against government rules not to conduct business with tax defaulters.

In similar fashion to the direct orders issued at Mater Dei for its security officers, Pullicino's ministry also extended service contracts beyond their date of expiry, without signing any for-

mal agreements.

The Auditor has told the ministry that "rigid compliance" with the law was required "for the sake of fairness and transparency."

Shortcomings at the Marsa abattoir were the most conspicuous. A €477,000 direct order for consultancy on the incinerator "could not be traced". €32,000 paid to architects engaged directly for refurbishment carried no "written evidence of approval" from the finance ministry, and no agreement was signed with the architects. The abattoir upgrade contract was also extended for two years for an additional €165,000 without a formal extension, despite the project had to be carried out "as soon as possible and within 2006". Another €65,000 was paid for skips at the abattoir in 2007 and 2008, despite the expiry of the contract in 2006 – the Auditor said "no formal extensions were traced".

CONTINUES ON PAGE 5



Direct orders issued without finance ministry approval, but ministry claims its "intention was to follow spirit of procurement laws"

Illegal trapping persists under 'veil of legality'

RAPHAEL VASSALLO

FINCH trapping, supposedly phased out under EU law at the end of 2008, was still widespread in various parts of the island throughout the 2009 autumn season – with some

trappers reportedly availing of an EU derogation for four different (legal) species, in order to camouflage their illegal finch-trapping activities.

According to photographic evidence collated by BirdLife Malta in recent months, many of the 1,200+ trappers who ap-

plied this year to trap Common quail (*summien*), Song thrush (*malvizz*), Golden plover (*pluvier*) and Turtle dove (*gamiem*), are in fact using their licences to illegally trap finches (*ghasafar tal-ghana*) instead.

Evidence of widespread il-

legal trapping includes aerial photography showing the sheer density of trapping sites hugging the southern and western coasts of Malta – often on protected landscape such as garigue (*xaghri*).

CONTINUES ON PAGE 7

INTERVIEW 16-17

EDDIE FENECH ADAMI

"I dislike the word conservative, and frankly I don't accept it... I just hope that the PN remains faithful to the principles that built it."



NEWS 2-13

Crisis 2025: agriculture



pg10

Why Malta is struggling to save its natural water source

OPINION 17-24

Saviour Balzan
pg21



FEATURE 14-15



Growing up Borg Olivier: memories of Gorg 'my dad'

BUSINESS 60-61

Mark Lamb
pg61



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