



23<sup>rd</sup> January 2019

**Joint statement by the Federation of Underwater Activities Malta together with the Professional Diving Schools Association regarding Transport Malta's "Notice to Mariners 08/2019".**

The Federation of Underwater Activities Malta together with the Professional Diving Schools Association would like to express their views regarding the recent replacement of Notice to Mariners 05/2008 with Notice to Mariners 08/2019.

Both these organisations are welcoming the addition of no stopping nor anchoring areas by the inclusion of the two artificial wrecks scuttled since the publication of the older Notice. We look forward to the inclusion of additional wrecks in this list (at least some of the ten or more additional known wrecks) and other historical or underwater attractions to be provided with the same and better protection.

Both organisations note that the same notice has again specifically stated that certain types of surface fishing from passing boats is still allowed within these areas. We would like to have seen a change in this regard so that measures to encourage further protection of Malta and Gozo's underwater resources are taken.

It is to be noted that artificial reefs serve not only as an attraction for scuba or free divers but also as an "incubator" for fish which assist in replenishing fish stocks in the surrounding areas. The capture of fish within the specific area is counterproductive, especially at a stage where not only local professional and recreational fishermen are worried by the status of fish stocks near shore areas, but also local and foreign visitors who are free divers or scuba divers.

Local and foreign visitor are witnessing worrying declines of fish around the Maltese islands' coast, as supported by the latest state of the industry surveys. The diving industry brings tens of thousands of visitors yearly and the resounding complaint from these visitors relates to the limited amount or decline of sea life witnessed around our coast over the past few years, something that our closest competitors in this industry have plenty of!

Both entities would like to state as well that they consider the permission of such activities in and around wreck areas to present a serious danger to any scuba or free diver diving there. The risks from fishing lines and passing boats are potentially deadly. The allowance of passage further complicates the enforcement of protection for these zones as it is harder to distinguish between the different types of fishing to

confirm whether a rule was broken or not and many times offenders may be gone well before anyone can catch a registration number or by the time enforcement officers are anywhere in the area.

This is the equivalent of having a main road passing through a family park.

We feel the relevant authorities should have instead used this opportunity to update this notice by designating these areas as no go areas for boating, bar for bona fide divers' boats using the protocol as described within the notice. Additionally these are to be required to exercise extreme care when accessing the restricted zone. Where possible, instead of anchoring, use of permanent mooring points should be encouraged.

These sites should be also clearly marked with perimeter indicator buoys to indicate the area around wrecks at least for 9 months of the year, from March to December, during which most free diving, scuba diving, boating and fishing activity occurs.

We call upon the relevant authorities to take immediate action in this respect and prior to the spring when water activities around the coast will increase tenfold.

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