

Protecting Our Lady's Island lagoon

Sir, – Paddy Woodworth gives us a graphic picture of the present state of the Mar Menor in southeast Spain (“It is our jewel: Can Europe’s biggest lagoon ecosystem be saved?”, *Science*, November 24th).

Unfortunately, there is no need to travel to Murcia to see a formerly magnificent lagoon all but destroyed by human foolishness.

We have recently submitted our final report to the Environmental Protection Agency on the present state of Our Lady's Island lagoon in Co Wexford, one of Ireland's biggest brackish water lagoons.

Our report echoes many of the findings mentioned by Paddy Woodworth, such as a gross excess of nitrogen-rich run-off polluting the lagoon, oxygen-deficient bottom sediments too toxic for marine life and the extinction of formerly abundant species. Matching Paddy Woodworth's description of the Mar Menor prior to its degradation are the wonderful descriptions of aquatic life in Lady's Island lagoon by the late Dr Brenda Healy and Mr D Bates written in the 1970s.

Human activity has now all but destroyed the rare and fascinating ecosystem in Lady's Island, just as it appears to be do-

ing in the Mar Menor – only rapid and determined change in human activity can restore these invaluable lagoonal ecosystems. Both lagoons are supposedly protected by the EU birds directive, habitats directive and the water framework directive, but to date this protection has proved more notional than real. Our research indicates that it may no longer be possible to restore Lady's Island Lagoon to its condition in the 1970s but we were extremely impressed by the decision of the Spanish government to invest €500 million in an attempt to save the Mar Menor. A proportional investment, area for area, in the future of Lady's Island would come to a mere €9 million. We must hope that governments, no more than individuals, can learn from good example. – Yours, etc,

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