



Today saw the celebration of Posidonia Forum, part of Save Posidonia Project, a festival which takes place October 12-15 on Formentera. Opening words were spoken by the Formentera Council's vice-president, Susana Labrador, who reminded crowds that the festival was put on by the administration in support of a broader effort, Year of Sustainable Tourism.

Labrador called the gathering “a deep-dive into posidonia” and a look at “the threats posed to it and challenges facing conservation,” all part of an effort to make tourism and environmental conservation compatible. Pilar Costa, secretary of the president's office of the Govern balear, also gave welcoming words, thanking the Formentera Council for carrying the project forward and highlighting the Palma administration's own work to bring together tourism and environmentally responsible policies, such as the “sustainable tourism tax” (*Impost de Turisme Sostenible*).

### Talks and round-tables

All day long experts in the field gave conferences on tourism and the environment. Of five morning events, the first, on innovation and technology, was conducted via video with a representative of the World Tourism Organisation. Next came talks by Pierre-Yves Cousteau and biologist Manu San Félix, the former describing a project dubbed Cousteau Divers on Formentera and the latter sharing with audiences his own personal trajectory in “From Formentera to National Geographic”. Greenpeace's Elvira Giménez led a discussion on plastics in world oceans, now and in the future, and Clara Calatayud closed the morning series with a talk about “The shark Odissey” subtitled “Ecotourism and the search for conservation”.

Afterwards, a round-table discussion on tourism had the participation of Ms Calatayud, Xàbia mayor José Chulvi, Cabildo del Hierro's vice-president Juan Pedro Sánchez, Govern balear ministry of tourism spokesman Pere Muñoz, president of Formentera's league of hotels, Vicent Tur, and the island's tourism minister, Alejandra Ferrer. Panelists discussed the importance of environmental safeguards when developing so-called “ecotourist” products.

The programme resumed at 3.00pm with WWF's Oscar Esparza, who unpacked some of the efforts afoot in Spain to protect marine life. Raquel Vaquer-Sunyer, of IMEDEA, tried to get at the question of what we know about posidonia today, and GEN-GOB's Francisco Sobrado gave

a talk framing the sea as “a shared responsibility”. Guillem Roca spoke to audiences about “observers of the seas” while Irene Díez gave a presentation called “Upcycling the Oceans” in which the Ecoalf representative talked about the promise of an initiative of the circular economy making rubbish fashionable.

Afterwards came a round-table discussion on the environment that included former Oceana president Xavier Pastor, Raul José Alvarez of the Ghostfishing project, GEN-GOB's Marià Marí, Elvira García, of the directorate general of coasts and the sea, Marta Castelló, chief of the Eivissa-Formentera Ses Salines nature preserve and environment secretary Daisee Aguilera. The panel of experts spoke in unison about the need for reverse growth in protecting the environment and why education and outreach will be key to tackling challenges on the horizon.

### **Anchorage on Formentera's seaboard**

For her part, CiF environment secretary Daisee Aguilera used forum to unveil an initiative focussed on anchoring boats and the ability of Formentera's seaboard to accommodate them.

According to Aguilera, the proposal currently awaiting review by the Govern balear is based first on physically measurable criteria—“quantification of sand, current posidonia mapping and, in contested areas, expanded swimming zones that stretch 200 metres outward from the coast”—and second on environmental factors (placing anchors or buoys on posidonia is expressly prohibited, for instance). Aguilera described the creation of “a 10-metre buffer zone between posidonia meadows and the shore ensure the plant is safe from chains and anchors as they are dragged about”.

The Council proposes is a variable system of controls whereby anchorage is permitted in offshore areas with vast stretches of open sand, such as Cala Saona, but subject to measures such as the so-called “eco-buoys” in areas closer to posidonia meadows, like the beaches at Illetes. The number of ships that can drop anchor will depend on three factors (size, weather conditions and wind flow) and will be administered through an online system of pay reservations. Visitors to the website will also be able to consult an up-to-the-minute feed with the number of ships allowed to drop anchor.

Boats will be required to register across an online platform that enables checks that payment and registration has occurred. Secretary Aguilera launched a call for “a simpler, easier system of fines based on the size of offending ships” and looked ahead to the inclusion of posidonia meadows in nautical maps”.

Lastly, Aguilera stressed that any system of checks would need to include a recycling and waste collection programme for watercraft. The system of pay would be based on the weight and associated management costs of the rubbish collected.

**Closing ceremony**

The forum's closing ceremony was led by Govern vice-president and tourism secretary Biel Barceló, who highlighted his office's ardent support for the Save Posidonia Project, including presentations in Germany, France and Italy and press trips with German and Spanish journalists to marshal awareness of the project and how funding will be used.

According to Barceló, it is a project that “fits perfectly with our strategy on sustainable tourism development, the point of which is to make tourism compatible with the environment and quality of life for residents of the areas”. In addition, he stressed the significance of the project given the designation of 2017 as International Year for Sustainable Tourism. It bears remembering that the Save Posidonia Project also received recognition from the Govern as the year's best sustainable tourism initiative.

Alejandra Ferrer, Formentera's vice-president and tourism secretary, gave closing comments as well. In it, she highlighted some of the challenges ahead, such as regulating anchorage, effluent runoff, improperly disposed of plastics and waste management.

Said the secretary: “Sustainability is no longer an option; it is an imperative. We must continue working to ensure Formentera remains one of the best options for travellers, as a holiday destination, and for our children, as a home”. To get there, Ferrer called on public institutions, the private sector and the public to protect local ecosystems and posidonia. “The Mediterranean's very biodiversity depends on it,” she said.

Also noteworthy were three visual art shows by Elena Urizar that took place during the day. For all the details, visit the festival's website at [www.saveposidoniaproject.org](http://www.saveposidoniaproject.org). The programme continues through Sunday.