The Formentera Council held its March plenary session today, which featured a unanimous vote to create new protected marine areas to safeguard the future of traditional fishing on Formentera. Bartomeu Escandell, the CiF's vice-president, chair of the presidential cabinet and councillor of rural affairs, gave details.

According to Escandell, the Council's appeal, to the regional government and the national department of environment, turns on the creation of new protected areas—three in the inshore waters of punta de sa Creu and another two in the outer waters of sec des Ram and Baix Fondo. Escandell called it “an effort to defend biodiversity and the future of Formentera's fishing fleet”. Formentera relies heavily on traditional fishing and the boost it provides the island's gastronomic enterprises, which cater to residents and tourists alike, Escandell added.

Today's plenary motion came on the back of a technical report, commissioned by the Council, from the specialist company TRAGSATEC, and a green-light from Formentera's brotherhood of fishermen and the directorate general of fishing in the Balearics. Approval from the two entities covered both which swaths were to be included in the reserves and their proposed level of protection.

Rural renewal

Plenary members also unanimously adopted guidelines for collaboration between the Council and the island's cooperative of farmers. The measure is aimed at extending programmes to renew agriculture and reclaim landscapes through 2017.

The rural affairs councillor recalled the Council's programme, launched in 2015 and still active today, to revive Formentera's countryside. He pinned support for the farmers' cooperative and the farmland reserve initiative (“Cens de Terres” in Catalan) on a commitment to “reclaiming the farmable land that was abandoned with the restructuring of our local economic model”. Escandell described a two-pronged approach: first, revive primary industry and, second, beautify rural landscapes. The public initiative will receive €95,000 in 2017.

Investing in Ràdio Illa

Across-the-board support was also received by proposed regulatory underpinning for collaboration between the Council and ACAF, a local group promoting the audiovisual arts and culture. The measure also includes content production at Formentera's local public radio station, Ràdio Illa.

Escandell hailed the measure for “eliminating direct political influence by enlisting an outside association in the station's oversight”. In recent years Formentera's hometown station has gone through an important turnabout, casting off its status as an “amateur” outfit in favour of more professional features like paid, qualified staff. To further propel those changes as well as the social unity implicit in a strong public radio station, Formentera will increase ACAF's 2017 funding by €10,000, bringing it to €50,000.

Dry stone walls

The plenary also gave approval for a bid to qualify the traditional technique used to build dry stone walls as “intangible cultural heritage”. Heritage councillor Susana Labrador highlighted a simultaneous effort on the international front to gain similar acknowledgement from UNESCO. Besides requesting the distinction, which the other Balearic councils have also done, Labrador underscored other protective measures—“like this year's educational courses or funding for repairs”. The goal, she says, is to guarantee an enduring protection of Formentera's heritage.

Plenary members also received the resignation of Popular Party rep Gabriela Mayans. She will be replaced by the next person on the group's roster.

Official statements

The plenary gathering also served as the occasion for a reading of the administration's declaration on International Women's Day, March 8, 2017. In issuing the statement, the Formentera Council adds its voice to the call for a more egalitarian future. It acknowledges the fact that true equality cannot exist until gender violence is banished. The Council reaffirms its commitment to human rights, which, consequently, is a commitment to women's rights and equal opportunities for both sexes. The Council explicitly salutes all those who have worked to eradicate inequality till present and reiterates its firm determination to rout all that remains today.

“We must continue to press forward with policies promoting women at the workplace and female entrepreneurs, equal opportunities through education, women in IT and rural women. Local

institutions must have the authority, the means and the resources to work alongside our institutions in Madrid and Palma to ensure correct application of equality and empowerment policies.

Report

“This year marks the tenth since the Council's inception,” recalled social welfare and human resources councillor Vanessa Parellada, “in that time, social welfare has grown from a small office charged with basic services to a large department with authority at the municipal and island level”.

She held up the social work unit (“Unitat de Treball Social”) as the Office of Social Welfare's nerve centre, citing 352 interventions from the unit's primary care workers in 2016. Care for families made up the lion's share (97), followed by services for the elderly (70) and care for mental health patients (41). Staffers' work covers everything from counselling and orientation to help with benefits requests and referrals to specialised services. Twenty-seven new features have been added to the office's telephone service and 48 individuals and families have benefitted from at-home care. Sixty-one per cent of those beneficiaries are senior citizens and an especial prevalence of that work encompasses personal hygiene assistance.

The office delivers three kinds of benefits: emergency assistance (€11,810 spread across 40 dispersals), guaranteed minimum income and help in social inclusion and job placement (12 cases) and individual assistance dispersals (17).

The office's support of children and families includes grants such as tuition at early-learning centres (received by four households), school supplies and textbooks (eight), participation in sports (nine), summer school (nine).

Psychological assistance, another service ofÂ the office, entails evaluating and facilitating individual and group therapy and was given in 16 cases.

Parellada described care for domestic violence victims as one of the office's most “delicate tasks”. Sixty percent of victims pressed charges against their attacker and restraining orders were issued in 14 cases. Twenty-one of 27 victims were referred directly from hospital or Guardia Civil services. The majority of women in those cases (12 out of 21) are mothers;

typically their children are under 18 (16 our of 21) and, predominately, the woman continues to live with her attacker (13 out of 21). Women who are mistreated psychologically (or physically and psychologically) with an average age of 45 represent the prevailing archetype.

Parellada also spoke of the “consolidated” nature of her office's work on immigration. Their efforts, she said, focus on educating and orienting recent arrivals from beyond Europe's borders and promoting such individuals' equal access to public services, as well as their inclusion in the local community. In 2016 the office provided immigration-related assistance to roughly 470 individuals through 1,088 appointments and 166 newly opened cases.

On youth services, Parellada held up the fitness-oriented leisure programme «Formentera marxa» and outreach at local schools. A specialised company has been enlisted in the effort to turbocharge outreach to high school students. The firm's staffer continues to work with pupils in primary school on issues of socialising, emotional intelligence, decision-making and conflict resolution. Leisure activities are likewise organised afternoons from Thursday to Saturday in the Sant Ferran school courtyard.

Leisure in Sant Francesc is yoked to the town's youth centre, the Casal de Joves. Now in its tenth year, the Casal continues to offer a monthly activities programme for youth aged 10 to 26 (the majority of participants are between 14 and 17). Youth also take part in events promoted by other groups inside and outside the administration, like Festa Intercultural, International Women's Day and school days.

On human resources, the councillor described an initial period of growth followed by a run of consolidation that began one year ago and continues today. “With the benefit of hindsight,” said the councillor, “it would appear my hypothesis last year was absolutely correct”. The focus, she added, is on “working within our present legal framework to guarantee stability and high-quality work among the professionals that drive this administration”.