



The respective presidents of the Eivissa and Formentera Island Council, Vicent Serra and Jaume Ferrer, met today in Brussels with the general director of the Environment to the European Commission, Karl Falkenberg, to discuss the topic of petrol prospecting on the Gulf of Valencia and the western coast of the Pitiüsa Islands (Eivissa and Formentera).

Also present at the encounter were Eivissa's councilor of the Environment, Pepa Costa; the Formentera Council's councilor of the Presidency, the Tax Office and Territory, Bartomeu Escandell; the coordinator to Aliança Mar Blava, Sara Pizzinato; a representative of Brussels-based ecological organisation Oceana, Nicolas Fournier; and the Eivissa Council's technical specialist on environmental affairs, Jaume Estarellas. Additional attendees included minister to the European Parliament Rosa Estaràs and members of her cabinet.

For his part, director general Falkenberg was joined by two technical specialists from his department. After an introduction made by the two Pitiüsa council presidents, presentations were given by technical specialists of the Oceana group, the Aliança Mar Blava and the Formentera Council, each outlining the potential environmental impact of the petrol prospecting in question as well as supporting documentation.

The Eivissa and Formentera representatives asked for the project to be paralysed but also, pending this, they requested special attention be paid by the European Commission to the proceedings relating to the project's environmental impact study. Director general Falkenberg pledged to crosscheck all of the documentation supplied by the other ministries on the matter with the material supplied by the two island councils. Falkenberg also noted that, given the fact that the process remained unfinished, the petitions by the island administrations were coming at the most opportune time.

Falkenberg expressed his personal disagreement with the current manner in which the project's environmental impact reports are produced. At present, evaluations of the project's environmental impact are partial and drafted successively as plans advance. The director general stated his belief that environmental impact should be measured taking into account the combined impact of all the project's phases together, rather than separately, as was initially planned. He suggested that this form of global analysis was more likely to result in

recommendations to dismiss the endeavour, that is, to favour what is known as the 'zero alternative'. The idea of amplifying the environmental impact study to include all phases of the project, as well as the notion of the 'zero alternative' (no action), form the principal portion of the Eivissa Island Council's written petition to the Ministry of Industry and Tourism.

The representatives of the Pitiüsa Island administrations and the ecological organisations were grateful for the European Commission director's attention and work, and reiterated their request for a meeting with the corresponding European Commissioner on the matter. The work of MEP Estaràs and her cabinet in securing the meeting was also profoundly appreciated.

Eivissa Island Council president Vicent Serra manifested his satisfaction with the assurances of the European Commission's General Direction of the Environment. "They indicated that they were going to be extremely attentive to the evolution of administrative proceedings and proceedings related to the environmental impact studies. [They expressed] that this is where we could take an active role. For our part we will continue working to prevent the prospecting activity, which stands to gravely affect our environment and local economy".

For his part, Formentera Council president Jaume Ferrer reflected positively on the encounter, stating that "despite the general director's commitment to closely observe the proceedings to ensure the Spanish national government's strict compliance with environmental regulations, we must continue working to show the serious repercussions that the prospecting activity could have on our local environment and economy, [placing] special emphasis on the catastrophic consequences it could have on our prairies of posidònia oceànica, declared World Heritage Sites by UNESCO".