

When local legislators gathered today for the February plenary session of the Consell de Formentera, GxF-PSOE cabinet members outvoted the Sa Unió opposition and secured backing for a rule change in the island's Strategic Subsidies Plan, paving the way for fast-tracking of pandemic assistance. Finance and tax office councillor Bartomeu Escandell asserted the change would get money to crisis-hit islanders faster and create an expanded arsenal of local government responses to the urgent needs of islanders, families and the productive sector.

New waste pickup and transport contract

Another measure that overcame opposition abstention with support from the cabinet involved tendering a procurement contract for waste collection and transport, clean roads and beaches, green spaces conservation and maintenance and management of the island's waste treatment plant. Environment chief Antonio J Sanz first underscored Consell staffers' essential role moving the project ahead, adding that the new contract would be "key to bringing the island's waste management contract in line with islander needs and EU legislation". "We're on the way to a cleaner island and a cleaner environment", he pledged, "and this new service will help us get there."

The eight-year, €31.5 million contract with two-year option includes terms like an upgraded vehicle fleet, enhanced organics collection, new bins and more frequent pickup.

Extending holiday rentals

One measure that won cross-party support was the cabinet's proposed twelve-month extension of holiday rental permits which came to term year's end 2020. Councillor Escandell noted this was the second such extension in two years, with local legislators passing the first last year as a relief measure amid the unfolding public health emergency. "We'll be tacking on another extension in 2021 because the crisis hasn't gone anywhere", said Escandell, calling the measure "just one part of the this cabinet's multi-level economic response since the pandemic began".

Permits issued while earlier regulations were in force and which were due to expire in 2021 will be automatically extended. The change also affects permits which were extended previously.

An associated €70 fee is typically charged for such permits, which are valid for twelve months.

Alignment with agriculture act

Assembly members also united to support a modification aimed at bringing the island's territorial plan in line with Balearic legislation on agriculture. Land councillor Rafael González said the move ensured the continuity of Formentera's agrarian and urban planning regulations: "The Consell will continue supporting and promoting local farming, and we'll continue safeguarding our land in application of local accords".

formentera.eco

Cabinet members pushed through the proposed ceiling and enforcement period for formentera.eco, the system of permits allowing motorists to operate vehicles on the island. On Monday the island's league of civic groups voted to implement the regulatory scheme from 24 June to 7 September 2021, restricting driving and parking privileges to holders of pertinent authorisation.

"We're extending regulation in both directions per majority accord by the Consell d'Entitats", said González. He noted that from the start, the sustainable mobility scheme's agreed upon objective was "to reduce total vehicles on the road by 16%, limiting infrastructural expansion, protecting the land and making sure that visitors to the island find what they're looking for and that residents can enjoy the island too."

Authorisations to operate vehicles on local roads will be capped in 2021 at 20,591 — a 4% reduction relative to the previous year which, together with the seasonal timeline of enforcement, Sa Unió party members abstained from voting on. President Ferrer criticised the move, describing it as "manoeuvring by the opposition to undermine enforcement", and trumpeted the measure's ultimate passing. "This grassroots proposal is backed by islanders, who have voted not only to support limits on in-bound vehicles in principle but also to extend the regulatory period two weeks. It's a clear win for sustainability."

Installing waterside shade structures

Cabinet councillors prevailed over the opposition to ask the Govern balear and coastal authority to study granting Formentera permission to enhance its photovoltaic capacity by fitting seaside parking areas with solar-equipped pergolas instead of other shade structures which have been acquired but not yet remounted — or failing that, to simply remount the extant shade structures in time for summer 2021. Environment chief Antonio J Sanz described the appeal as "just one

part of the Consell's broader multi-faceted environmental strategy".

Cross-party appeal for SEPE upgrades

Another moment of unity saw the entire assembly press the National Public Employment Service to "take urgent steps to deliver appropriate year-round service on the island". Deputy premiere Ana Juan described the plea as longstanding and expressed hope that solutions would be forthcoming.

One of several opposition measures that garnered cross-party support will mean local government must petition competent authorities for an accessible entrance at Ses Illetes beach. With a similar measure, the island's legislators will ask regional authorities to extend public health subsidies to masks, with a cost-free option for pensioners and jobless individuals and, by the same measure, press Madrid to consider lowering the 21% value-added tax (IVA) to 4% on purchases of FFP2 masks.

Pine processionary

Cabinet councillors brokered an opposition measure pushing the regional government for new systems to eradicate the pine processionary and for continued fumigations in the most affected areas of the island. Councillors also asked the Govern to study and subsidise risk-free pest control techniques and seek agreement concerning a service or drop-off point for caterpillars captured with alternate controls.

Report from Councillor Antonio J Sanz

The environment and inspections chief began a report of projects in his departments by touting efforts to "retool the service for the new imperatives of the pandemic, adapting to evolving local needs and making public services available round-the-clock." Sanz highlighted a 2020 tweak of the roadworthiness site's appointment-scheduling system, with an additional hour in afternoons and increased total appointments, and applauded the service for maintaining a waiting-list of zero even today. "Inspections aren't typically as visible as other municipal services", Sanz asserted, "but Covid-19 has meant developing our presence on the ground: notifying hotels of changing restrictions, fielding inquiries and helping get businesses up and running again amid so much uncertainty."

As he reviewed initiatives from the environment department, Sanz described the year in waste management as "full of changes" and one typified by Covid-19 compliance, upgrades and preparations for a new procurement contract for waste management services. 2020 also

brought passage of an “Integrated Environment Permit” for Es Ca Marí substation: “Finally we have a document that differentiates between seasonal and permanent features of the substation and outlines noise mitigation measures and emission safeguards”. The year also came with developments in the Save Posidonia Project, a land grant for the Centre d’Esports Nàutics and a definitive contract to regulate moorage at Estany des Peix — meaning formation, at long last, of a follow-up committee.

Turning to the energy transition, Sanz pointed up VPP4Islands, new facilities and passage of the Special Plan for Energy Installations. He also noted the successful tendering of installation of new buoys, plus pallet- and bicycle-recycling initiatives and other projects linked to the circular economy.

Women’s Day

Plenary participants also green-lighted an International Women’s Day proclamation for 8 March — a day dedicated to increasing visibility around the struggle for equality and efforts to cultivate female participation and empowerment. Councillors agreed the pandemic has thrown up new obstacles both social and systemic in nature which undermine female participation and leadership. “We’ve been saying this for a year”, said equality chief Vanessa Parellada, “Formentera now has a female president, our island’s first. Of 17 elected positions, nine are held by women. Anyone paying attention to the local handling of the pandemic can see we have female leadership. But, the question remains, can we talk about full equality on Formentera? Answering it is our challenge as we move forward. We all have our part to play in the process, because inequality doesn’t benefit anyone.”

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