



Members of the Consell de Formentera rendezvoused today for the island's full-house assembly for the month of May, hewing to an online format to comply with coronavirus safety and distancing protocol. Following the digital hosting of a 15 May one-off plenary session, today's gathering marked the very first web-based celebration of an ordinary plenary session.

Attendees reviewed the third packet of economic and fiscal measures designed, in the words of economy and tax office chief Bartomeu Escandell, "to reduce the economic and social fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic". Assembly members formed a united voice in support of the first six measures of the packet, which included rebates and extensions on fee payments.

Assembly members adopted a measure to reimburse 50% of fees paid to the school of music and dance, summer school and nurseries, not to mention fees to use municipal facilities and host sports activities, and islanders who benefit are not excluded from additional assistance covering up to 75% of total costs. "Now is when the public sector must step in to minimise the hardships islanders are facing under the current crisis", said Escandell. "These benefits are designed to make sure no one is left behind."

The help is directed at self-employed individuals or "autonomous workers" whose invoices have shrunk by more than half compared to 2019 or who are otherwise affected by the crisis. Unemployed islanders can also apply, together with furloughed individuals and those who receive either the guaranteed social income or similar benefits.

Support for the primary sector

Attendees of the plenary also placed a temporary hold on fees at the abattoir. Escandell described the assistance as "a continuation of Formentera's long-standing support for the primary sector, and another instance of encouraging islanders to buy and consume local". The economy conseller also pointed out that the Consell has pledged €130,000 to the local agricultural co-operative, €37,000 to the livestock farmers association and €15,000 to the fishermen's guild in 2020.

Cross-party support was likewise secured for a move to do away with fees for Balearic visitors to La Mola's lighthouse in 2020 (last year only formenterers accessed the site for free). "The lighthouse remodel gave us both a cultural venue and an interpretive centre offering islanders the chance to discover the sea", said Escandell. "In view of exceptional circumstances, we're extending that chance to our neighbours across the Balearics".

Rollover surplus

The GxF-PSOE cabinet joined forces with opposition group Sa Unió to support a measure urging Madrid to let city, island and provincial councils use 100% of their 2019 surplus. Escandell pointed out that, as the Consell continues to close out last year's accounts, a new upward revision in the surplus from an earlier estimated one million euros to €1.5 million today "could, if legislative restrictions are loosened in this time of great need, go toward helping the people of the island". As of today, the Consell is authorised to spend €300,000, or 20%, of its surplus.

More economic measures

Assembly members gave an additional thumbs-up to a measure, brought by Sa Unió and brokered by the GxF-PSOE cabinet, encouraging local government to study an array of issues, like a line of renters' assistance for families, freelancers and small businesses; assistance for individuals studying off the island, as well as supplements to national and regional assistance to cover costs for students who stay here; applicability in 2020 of the fee for the permit allowing motorists to bring, operate and park vehicles on the island, and applicability in 2020 of the fee to access Ses Salines nature reserve. The Consell is also encouraged to debate, agree on and define related measures in line with its available budget.

Furloughed workers

A united front of support also came for an urgent proposal concerning furlough agreements (ERTO in Catalan and ERTE in Castilian Spanish). By pushing the central government to extend furloughs beyond 30 June, the measure aims to minimise the pandemic's toll on the unfolding tourism season, providing relief to productive sector businesses whose staffing needs involve permanent seasonal contracts.

According to the economy and tax office chief, "the request means urging Madrid to maintain full exemption from Social Security payments, at least until some normality has resumed, for non-returning employees even in the event of a partial return of furloughed workers". Finally, Formentera urges the executive branch to set up a system so businesses with furloughs due to force majeure can opt to maintain that status if a partial furlough is unviable—not based on ministerial orders concerning permitted types of business activity, but because reopening is

hampered de facto by an absence of tourism.

Coastal licences

With “yes” votes from the governing cabinet and “no” votes from the opposition, approval came for a proposal to study the legal viability of reducing, commensurate to the duration of emergency orders, the fees collected from license-holders of beach concessions under the use regime of Land and Sea Public Spaces. Environment chief Antonio J Sanz described the move as “creating the legal framework to apply a discount that we consider necessary”. Based on estimates, concessions-holders should benefit from a 32.17% reduction in the fee they pay to the Formentera government.

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Another measure that passed with “yes” votes from the cabinet and “no” votes from the opposition was a request that the regional health ministry put measures in place to set up a base for 061 emergency phone service at the Formentera Hospital. The authors of the proposal insist the move be coordinated with the reopening of borders and separation needs of patients who display respiratory symptoms. “Our 061 needs extend beyond summertime and beyond temporary reinforcements”, said social welfare conseller Rafael Ramírez, “the service is critical to giving patients proper care. Differentiated 061 service would allow our hospital to differentiate care in possible Covid-19 cases.” The proposal states, “If our hospital sees a return to the level of activity seen in 2016, extra staff are necessary, with or without additional 061 service”.

Plenary attendees also heard about the decision by members of Sa Unió (PP-Compromís) to donate 20% of compensation accrued during the state of emergency to Formenterers Solidaris. Members of the group said the money should go toward “making sure the NGO’s work continues”.

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Department of Communications

Consell de Formentera