



On January 25, 2017, a special committee charged with promoting sustainable tourism in the Balearic Islands picked the projects that will receive money from the sustainable tourism levy in 2016.

One of the chosen projects was a plan to employ at-risk individuals in yearly coastal cleanups at beaches, coves and other public places. Architects of the plan say they aim to protect, preserve and restore natural, rural and agrarian settings.

The nearly €45,000 project, steered by the Balearic ministry of environment, agriculture and fishing's "Quality Environments Service", began last April and will continue to July.

Sebastià Sansó, chief of ecology education, environmental quality and waste, joined CiF environment secretary Daisee Aguilera for a first-hand look at the operations conducted by Apfem-Aktua cleaning crews. To date, 2,815 kilograms of waste have been taken away.

Efforts included transport and recycling of litter pulled from nearby waters, environmental outreach, environmental patrols and accident reporting, waste tracking studies, extraction and removal of invasive species, studying distribution of local plant known as "marine fennel" and gathering of graphic information for outreach.

On Eivissa and Formentera, contracts to coordinate operations were awarded to Apfem-Aktua and the Balearic Islands Red Cross. As an "investment project" offering long-term employment prospects, the initiative gave workers experience towards employment in the public and private sectors and reinforced the stability of their professional prospects moving forward.

Apart from the immediately visible impact offered by upkeep in public spaces, coves and beaches and waste removal in the outdoors, Sansó described the project as "a chance to educate the public on ecological issues".

The beaches and coves included in the project are coastal areas with unique ecological significance, whether as protected natural spaces (ENP for the initials in Catalan) or designated sites on the EU's Natura 2000 network of nature protection areas.

Explaining the effectiveness of the programme, Daisee Aguilera pointed out that the places that receive attention aren't often the places most frequented by tourists. One sight that is all too common? Washed up plastic objects. Aguilera described plastics in the seas as a “planetary problem” and urged “ongoing action to raise awareness about the harm they do”. Worse yet, she said, is that plastic rubbish makes its way into the food chain and affects both plants and humans—“with all the dangers and setbacks that go along with it”. As evidence of the programme's social impact the secretary held up the participation of at-risk individuals, for whom the initiative offers many different opportunities—“a job, the quality of life boost of receiving a paycheck, and the satisfaction of caring for the local environment”.