



Yesterday evening in the cultural hall of the Formentera Council, marine biologist and former vicepresident of Oceana Xavier Pastor chaired a conference intended to explain his company's proposal to establish as national park —and in so doing guarantee protection for— a range of underwater mountains in Balearic waters. The three mountains in question (Ausías March, Emile Baudot and Ses Olives) are in a ravine known as el canal de Mallorca located in an area that stretches 10 to 40 nautical miles east of Formentera.

Before a significant cross section of local environmentalists, fishermen and nautical industry representatives, Mr Pastor set about explaining the advantages of protecting the mountains. First off, says Pastor, such an inclusion would engender sustainable tourism in the long term. Second, protection of the area could mean benefits —bigger catches and bigger fish— for Formentera's fishing sector. If the area is given status as a national park, Pastor calculates that the park's annual maintenance will run «between one and two million, money that would need to come from Spain's central government».

The presentation was underpinned by an Oceana study based on four robotic expeditions —at depths of 1,000 metres— through the ravine between 2006 and 2014. According to Pastor, the study provides «a technical basis for protecting the area and the diverse and vulnerable plant and wildlife that live there». Formentera's environmental councillor Daisee Aguilera was also present at the event. She indicated the Council will now study Oceana's proposal «paying particular attention to area selected for protection».