

PROPOSED OIL TESTS THREATEN BALEARIC TOURISM



For years, the seas around the Balearic Islands have evoked images of calm, clear waters with frolicking dolphins and offered the perfect destination for holidaymakers that want to swim, explore or simply relaxing by the shore. The problem for these frequent visitors, and the locals that rely on their trade, is that a Scottish energy group is also keen for a little exploration of their on in the Gulf of Valencia to search for oil, a proposal that has led to worries that these tropical waters and their playful inhabitants will be harmed.

Cairn Energy are optimistic about a minimal impact to these islands but locals are more concerned.

This energy company claims to have “already engaged with local communities”, and that they are “committed to responding to any concerns” and prioritise “environmental management and protection”; however, they seem almost stubbornly adamant that any tests carried out will not damage the local environment, despite intense opposition. Local experts are less convinced, expressing their concern for the safety of some of the unique species that live in the waters around the Balearic Islands and the potential for dolphin fatalities as a result of the high frequency sonar testing that is required to locate the oil. The current plans would place Cairn Energy and its efforts outside of the UNESCO heritage site that surrounds the island, but that does not mean it cannot impact upon it and there are deep concerns that these proposals will spoil the local landscape and the appeal of these islands to visitors.

Tourism is vital to these islands, with its revenue being one of the top contributing factors to the local economy, and millions of visitors are drawn to the region every year because of the relaxing vibe, beautiful views and fantastic experiences. What happens to tourism if those scenes, seas and opportunities are threatened by this potential damage to the local environment or if tests are successful and an oil platform is constructed? Cairn Energy may insist that they will be working away from the heritage site but there are concerns about accidents and oil spills so close to the islands and the permanent damage to the so far unspoilt views. If these perfect views and clear waters are obstructed and contaminated then the primary appeal of the Balearic Islands will also be damaged and large numbers of these important visitors may turn away.

Officials and locals are trying to fight back to protect these islands from this threat.

The government has until the end of the year to fully review the plans and find a way to stop the sonar tests and drilling, a deadline that has spurred the locals on to put added pressure on their local representatives and had led to increased protests. Local government officials from the environmental ministry seem to appreciate these sentiments and have stated that their responsibility is to protect the islands from the environmental and economic damage that Cairn Energy's proposal could inflict on the Balearic Islands - a positive sign for all those that want to see those dolphins protected and those calm, clear, relaxing waters preserved for the millions of tourists the region depends on.

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