*Santander for the seas* promotes a plastic-free Mediterranean sea with sperm whales and Posidonia.

* Tursiops Foundation, Blue Life Foundation and Ecoalf Foundation are the three beneficiary organisations of the Santander for the Seas 2023 programme, the Banco Santander Foundation's initiative to protect the seas and oceans.
* This is the third call of the programme, which has allocated more than 1,000,000 euros in total to the recovery of habitats and unique and sentinel species.
* The projects selected in the call are aimed at creating a safe breeding area for the Mediterranean sperm whale, recovering posidonia meadows in the Balearic Islands and cleaning up plastic waste in the Marine Protected Areas of the Levante region of eastern Spain.

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The Banco Santander Foundation, in line with its environmental commitment, has held the third edition of 'Santander for the Seas', its programme aimed at the conservation and protection of seas and oceans. The beneficiary organisations in this new edition were Asociación Tursiops, Fundación Blue Life and Fundación Ecoalf.

The projects presented are aimed at creating a safe breeding area for the Mediterranean sperm whale, recovering posidonia meadows in the Balearic Islands and promoting the circular economy with the recycling of plastic waste by involving the fishing sector in the marine protected areas of the Spanish Levante. Each of the organisations will receive a grant of up to 150,000 euros to carry out their project.

On 5 June, World Environment Day, the slogan chosen by the United Nations was *‘For a planet free of plastic pollution’.* According to the UN report, plastics account for 85% of marine litter, impacting the health of ecosystems, wildlife, and humans, as well as generating significant economic consequences in coastal communities. Despite the initiatives and awareness-raising work being carried out by non-governmental organisations, drastic action is clearly needed, otherwise plastic waste in the oceans is expected to almost triple by 2040.

This is the scenario that gives meaning to the project *Upcycling the oceans* by the Ecoalf Foundation as part of the Santander for the Seas programme. An initiative that has been cleaning the oceans since 2015 with the help of fishermen and giving a second life to plastic waste, promoting the circular economy, and involving a sector that is very affected by the presence of waste in the sea.

"Upcyling the Oceans seeks to implement a solution against the waste that surrounds the Marine Protected Areas of the Spanish Levant through the creation of an ecosystem formed by alliances between the fishing sector, the scientific and technological community, industry and the civilian population," explains Andrea Ruzo, director of the Ecoalf Foundation. "Since 2015, we have managed to remove more than 1000 tonnes of waste, which would otherwise have remained at the bottom of the Spanish seas forever."

The Mediterranean Sea is under high demographic and tourist pressure and is home to numerous industries along its coastline, which contributes to it being considered the most polluted sea on the planet. According to UNEP-MAP data, only 15% of plastic waste remains on the surface. The rest sinks and degrades, becoming a source of microplastics and toxins. Upcycling the oceans aims to clean up both floating and submerged waste, and to trace the origin of this waste, in an attempt to find out the root of the problem and propose solutions.

Through the Santander for the Seas programme and "together with more than 1,900 fishermen from the Spanish Levante, we want to clean up the Mediterranean Sea. Additionally, through our alliance with Ecoembes, we wish to demonstrate how the circular economy can help us give a second life to the waste that has a direct impact on the biodiversity of Marine Protected Areas", Ruzo continues.

The recovery and conservation of endangered, unique and sentinel species is another of Santander for the Seas' objectives. The MOBY MUMMY project of the Tursiops Association aims to directly protect the Mediterranean sperm whale via three complementary ways: firstly, to delimit the scope of the recently discovered breeding area of the species in Northern Menorca and to draw up a map of critical areas based on navigation data and the presence of sperm whales. Secondly, to submit all the information gathered to the administration and request the creation of a Marine Protected Area (MPA) to preserve the area. And, last but not least, to maximise the impact by including shipping companies in the guardianship and raising social awareness.

"Sperm whales are key in the fight against climate change as they are an inverter species of the cycle of matter in the ocean, favouring the growth of phytoplankton, which reduces CO2 levels," explains Txema Brotons, scientific director of Asociación Tursiops.

The main cause of death of the Mediterranean sperm whale is collision with vessels. The solution seems simple: to reduce speed and redirect maritime traffic. However, in an area with such a density of vessels, and considering that the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) requires robust scientific data to propose route changes or speed reductions, it is vital to support organisations that can carry out studies aimed at identifying areas of critical habitat so that maritime traffic can be properly managed. "The importance of being able to define, limit and propose a marine protected area in the north of Menorca, possibly the only known sperm whale breeding area in the Western Mediterranean, makes the "Moby Mummy" project an indispensable step for the conservation of the species in our sea," Brotons concludes.

The Blue Life Foundation completes the group of entities selected by the Banco Santander Foundation to protect and preserve the Mediterranean Sea. Its project is aimed at restoring the Posidonia oceanica meadows, a source of biodiversity in the Balearic Islands, with an approximate surface area of 650 km2. They are listed as a natural habitat of Community interest in the Spanish Inventory of Marine Habitats and Species and considered a priority by the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, as it is considered a habitat threatened with extinction and whose conservation is a special responsibility for the community.

Posidonia oceanica is an aquatic plant endemic to the Mediterranean, considered the longest-living species in the biosphere at 100,000 years old, and provides a crucial habitat for a wide variety of marine species, as well as contributing to climate regulation and water quality". Óscar Caro, President of the Blue Life Foundation explains "Coral beds are the most complex and important of the biostructures of our seas, harbouring a rich and diverse biodiversity. Therefore, the conservation and recovery of the Posidonia oceanica community and coral reefs is essential to ensure the survival of these species and the protection of marine biodiversity".

This pioneering project (Restaura Coral & Posidonia) is highly innovative based on citizen participation in all phases, environmental education and the creation of pilot regenerative tourism experiences in Spain, involving the resident and visiting population, with experts and scientists who focus their mission on the identification of new coral populations in the Mediterranean and the recovery of Posidonia oceanica meadows with a multidisciplinary approach, as a fundamental strategy to implement efficient and effective protection models that promote a new paradigm shift in the relationship between society and its natural environment, involving present generations and ensuring a better personal and collective development that is fairer, more equitable and sustainable.

About Fundación Banco Santander

Fundación Banco Santander strives to contribute to building a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable society.

To this end, we develop initiatives grouped into three lines of action: the promotion of culture as a tool for understanding the world around us, social action to facilitate the progress of vulnerable groups and care for the environment to protect our natural heritage.

In all our programmes, we seek to create collaborative networks with the third sector to tackle the main global challenges.

More information about the Foundation can be found on our website www.fundacionbancosantander.com or through our social networks:

