

Re: Observation on Proposed Cooloo Windfarm Development, Barnadearg–Cooloo, Co. Galway

An Bord Pleanála Reference: 323761

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to submit an observation on the proposed Cooloo Windfarm development at Barnadearg–Cooloo, Co. Galway, currently before An Bord Pleanála under reference 323761. As a public representative for Galway East, I wish to bring forward a number of substantive concerns raised with me by local residents, community groups, and landowners who may be directly impacted by this proposal.

1. Potential Impacts on Local Water Sources

One of the most serious issues raised relates to the risk posed to three local water schemes—the Barnadearg/Gortbeg, Brierfield, and Mid Galway Public Water Scheme, which collectively supply an estimated 10,000 households.

Key concerns include:

- The spring at Pollifrin, which supplies the Brierfield and District GWS, lies within the same Zone of Contribution (ZOC) as the Mid Galway PWS and Barnadearg/Gortbeg GWS. All are part of the same sensitive groundwater flow system.
- Two turbines are located within the Source Protection Area (SPA) of this vulnerable hydrological zone.
- The applicant's own planning documents acknowledge that there is real risk to water quality and supply levels during construction, and they cannot guarantee that the water sources will not be impacted or that supply levels will not drop.

Given the critical importance of these water schemes to thousands of households, any development that places them at risk must be subject to the highest level of scrutiny and precaution.

2. Project Splitting

The development seeks planning for nine turbines at this stage, with a later intention to apply separately for the substation, BESS, and grid connection infrastructure.

This approach constitutes project splitting, contrary to good planning practice and to established principles requiring that all interdependent components of a single project be assessed together.

The development is clearly one integrated project and should only be assessed in its complete form, with all associated elements included in a single application.

3. Community Engagement

Residents have expressed significant dissatisfaction with the level and quality of community engagement to date. People are seeking clarity on:

- The level of ongoing engagement that will be provided
- How local households will be supported and informed throughout construction and operation

Residents have emphasised the need for open, proactive and continuous engagement.

4. Traffic, Road Network and Construction Impacts

The proposed development poses significant risks to local roads, traffic safety, and community access. Concerns raised include:

- The Traffic Management Plan lacks essential detail, including exact routing, timing, and number of HGV and turbine component movements.
- No commitments to off-peak or school-safe scheduling have been provided.
- There is no robust plan for road strengthening, maintenance, or reinstatement, despite the vulnerability of the narrow rural road network.

There has been a strong request for a clear and detailed Traffic Management Plan, with commitments to road reinstatement where required.

5. Residential Amenity Impacts

Constituents in the surrounding area have highlighted concerns regarding:

- Potential noise impacts, including low-frequency and night-time noise
- Shadow flicker affecting nearby dwellings
- The scale and height of the proposed turbines and their visual impact on the local landscape
- The proximity of certain turbines to established homes and the cumulative impact alongside other renewable developments in the wider region.

Residents are seeking reassurance that any potential impacts on homes and nearby schools will be fully assessed, appropriately mitigated, and subject to enforceable conditions.

6. Environmental, Biodiversity and Landscape Impacts

Residents have raised questions about the environmental implications of the proposal, specifically relating to:

- Impacts on birds, bats, and other protected species
- Possible hydrological impacts, including drainage alterations and watercourse effects
- Soil and peat stability in areas of excavation or construction

- The cumulative environmental effect of multiple renewable energy projects in nearby townlands.

It is important that all assessments provided are robust, transparent, and independently verifiable.

Conclusion

I am submitting this observation to reflect the concerns that have been brought to my attention by members of the local community living near the proposed development. I respectfully request that the Board give full consideration to these issues and ensure that any decision made takes account of the potential impacts on residents, local infrastructure, and the surrounding environment.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Albert Dolan TD

Teachta Dála, Galway East