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The Secretary
An Coimisiún Pleanála
64 Marlborough Street
Dublin 1, D01 V902

Re: Observation on proposed Maughanaclea Wind Farm

Planning reference: ACP-324165-26 / 324165

Applicant: Enerco

Submission of Objection

Amalia Gómez, Barnagowlane West, Goulanes, Bantry, Co. Cork

I am writing to object to the proposed wind farm at Maughanaclea. I live at Barnagowlane West, in the townland of Goulanes, in the Mealagh Valley. My home lies roughly three kilometres from the nearest proposed turbine. I am also the guest services manager at Wild Hideaways, a tourism business a short distance from where I live, and I want this submission to speak both for the household I keep and for the work I do, because the two are not separable here. The valley I go home to in the evening is the same valley I ask visitors to fall in love with by day, and the development now before the Commission threatens both at once.

A working knowledge of why people come. Most of my working week is spent with people who have travelled a long way to be in West Cork. They arrive from cities, frequently from abroad, and almost without exception the thing they say they have come for is the quiet and the sense of being somewhere unspoiled. I am not guessing at this. It is the single most common sentiment I hear at check-in, and it is what they write in our guest book when they leave. The Mealagh Valley sells itself on one promise: that here, the modern world steps back. A line of turbines on the ridgeline, each with rotating blades and a steady aviation light, breaks that promise in the most literal way possible. Visitors do not need a planning vocabulary to register the change. They simply see it, and they tell their friends, and the bookings that follow are the ones we never get to count.

The night sky is the asset, not a backdrop. The part of this application that worries me most, because it touches my livelihood directly, is the aviation lighting. The proposed turbines reach a tip height of 169 metres, well over fifty storeys, and structures of that height are required to carry aviation warning lights. People assume those lights are a small thing, a few red points on a far

hill. They are not. A peer-reviewed study by Bará and Lima, published in 2024 in the Journal of Quantitative Spectroscopy and Radiative Transfer, modelled exactly this question and found that a medium-intensity turbine light can appear brighter than Venus up to around four kilometres away, brighter than the brightest star in the night sky up to roughly ten kilometres, and remains visible to the unaided eye out to about thirty-eight kilometres (see source A). My home and my workplace both sit well inside the ten-kilometre band. What that finding means in plain terms is that the developer's lights would not be a minor feature of the night view. They would be among the brightest things in our sky, brighter than any natural object a guest could point a child towards.

This matters because West Cork's dark skies are a recognised and surveyed resource, not a romantic notion. A Fáilte Ireland feasibility study on dark sky tourism along the Wild Atlantic Way identifies the stretch from Clear Island northward, taking in Mizen Head and Sheep's Head, as carrying skies of Class 1 and Class 2 quality, meaning average to excellent darkness, with several West Cork communities actively exploring formal Dark Sky designation (see source B). The same study notes that dark sky experiences draw an off-season, multiple-night visitor and that the asset, once degraded by inappropriate lighting, is lost. The economic value of protecting it is not speculative either. An assessment of Galloway Forest Park in Scotland, the first International Dark Sky Park, found a return of GBP 1.93 for every pound spent on dark-sky-friendly lighting, and after a decade the park was generating an estimated GBP 500,000 a year from astronomy and dark-sky tourism (see source C). That is the kind of future a place like ours can build toward. A wind farm on the ridgeline does not just fail to help that future; it forecloses it. You cannot certify a dark sky reserve under a line of beacons brighter than the stars they are meant to protect.

A development working against the county's own plan and the State's own commitments. I find it difficult to reconcile this proposal with the protections the Cork County Development Plan extends to this landscape, or with the Programme for Government's stated intention to expand Ireland's network of Dark Sky reserves. The Meallagh Valley is precisely the sort of place those policies exist to safeguard. The valley also falls within the area covered by the Fáilte Ireland West Cork Coast Destination and Experience Development Plan, a strategy built squarely on unspoiled landscape and walking. To approve a development that contradicts the county's landscape policy, the State's dark sky policy and the region's own tourism plan, all at once, would send a strange signal about what those documents are worth.

Noise, and why it cannot be waved away. I want to register a clear and substantive objection on the grounds of noise, and I ask the Commission to weigh it carefully rather than treat it as a formality. The Meallagh Valley is steeply sided and acoustically complex, and that complexity is not a detail. A study by Van Renterghem, published in 2017 in Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A, examined sound propagation specifically from a ridge-mounted wind turbine

across a valley and found that valley terrain can focus and carry turbine sound in ways that flat-ground modelling does not capture, producing significant variation in the levels actually received (see source D). A turbine sitting on a ridge above a valley is the exact configuration that study addresses, and it is the exact configuration proposed here. I am not satisfied that the noise assessment submitted with this application has properly accounted for how sound will behave in this particular bowl of land. On top of that, there is the question of where background noise was measured. The quietest spots in this valley, the eco-retreats and the guest accommodation that the tourism economy depends on, are quiet precisely because they are tucked away, and if baseline readings were taken at noisier or more exposed locations the resulting limits will be set too generously to protect them. I would also draw attention to the construction phase. Rock-breaking on peaty upland ground, carried on for the eighteen to twenty-four months the developer anticipates, will echo across a valley like this one, and the disturbance to residents and to guests during that period would be considerable.

The health dimension of noise is well documented. A systematic review and meta-analysis by Onakpoya and colleagues, published in 2015 in *Environment International*, pooled data from observational studies and found that exposure to wind turbine noise significantly increased the odds of annoyance and of sleep disturbance, and the review noted that reported effects were more pronounced in quiet rural areas than in already-noisy ones (see source E). That last point is important for the Meelagh Valley. Our quietness is not a comfort to be lost lightly; it is, by the evidence, the very thing that makes turbine noise more intrusive when it arrives.

Cumulative burden and the question of consent. West Cork already carries a substantial and growing share of Ireland's onshore wind development. Adding the Maughanaclea turbines on top of what is already operating, permitted or proposed asks this one corner of the country to absorb a disproportionate amount of the national effort, and I do not believe the combined visual, acoustic and ecological effect of all of it together has been honestly assessed. I support action on climate change. I do not accept that it must be paid for by the irreplaceable assets of a single rural valley, when better-sited alternatives exist. This project is not community-owned, the profits will leave the area, and the community here has not given it meaningful consent. A Community Benefit Fund does not change any of that.

What I am asking. I am asking the Commission to refuse permission for the Maughanaclea Wind Farm. The aviation lighting would do measurable, evidence-based harm to a dark sky resource that West Cork is only beginning to recognise and develop. The noise assessment does not, in my view, reckon honestly with the terrain. And the development as a whole sits against the grain of the county development plan, the region's tourism strategy and the State's own commitment to protect dark skies. I see this valley from both sides of the front desk, as the person who lives in it and the person who asks visitors to treasure it, and from both sides the answer is the same. This is the wrong place. I thank the Commission for considering my submission.

Yours sincerely,

Amalia Gómez

Barnagowlane West, Goulanes, Bantry, Co. Cork

Sources cited

Source A: Bará, S. & Lima, R. C. (2024). *Quantifying the visual impact of wind farm lights on the nocturnal landscape*. *Journal of Quantitative Spectroscopy and Radiative Transfer*, 329, 109203.

Source B: CHL Consulting (2019). *Feasibility Study for Maximising the Tourism Potential of Dark Sky Assets on the Wild Atlantic Way*. Report prepared for Fáilte Ireland.

Source C: Galloway, R. / DarkSky UK (2023). *Submission of Evidence for UK Astronomy (AST001)*, written evidence to the UK Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, citing the economic impact assessment of Galloway Forest Park International Dark Sky Park.

Source D: Van Renterghem, T. (2017). *Sound propagation from a ridge wind turbine across a valley*. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A*, 375, 20160105.

Source E: Onakpoya, I. J., O'Sullivan, J., Thompson, M. J. & Heneghan, C. J. (2015). *The effect of wind turbine noise on sleep and quality of life: a systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies*. *Environment International*, 82, 1–9.