

Amy Carter-O'Sullivan
Moonlands, Laharanshermeen
Bantry, Co. Cork, P75 P599
amyosullivan1975@gmail.com

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

Re: Proposed Maughanaclea Wind Farm. Planning reference ACP-324165-26 / 324165.

I am writing to object to the proposed wind farm at Maughanaclea. I live at Moonlands, in the townland of Laharanshermeen, in the Mealagh Valley, about two kilometres from the nearest of the turbines that are proposed for the ridge. I want to tell you what that ridge, and the valley below it, is to the people who live in it. I am not going to give you figures. I am going to tell you about a year.

I first came to the Mealagh Valley in 1995. I have been with my husband for thirty-one years and we have lived at Moonlands for the last twelve, but I knew the valley long before I ever had an address in it. I fell in love with it on that first visit, and I think I knew, even then, that I would end up here. We were married in the valley on the fourth of December, 1999. It was a clear, crisp, cloudless winter's day, the kind this valley gives you if you are lucky, with a cool low sun and not a cloud over the ridge. I have measured my life out in this place ever since, and the way you measure a life here is by the turning of the year.

Begin in winter, because that is where the Mealagh Valley begins. The wind comes off Bantry Bay, ten kilometres to the west, and after enough years you learn its direction the way you learn a voice. The rain hammers the windows and we sit in by the fire and let it. From the kitchen and the living room I look out at the ridge, at the vast sky and the dark clouds moving over it, and the house feels like a held thing, a warm centre with the weather wheeling round it. When Aussie and I do go out, my dog of thirteen years and my best friend, it is like being wrapped in a cocoon, the waterproofs on, the rain and the wind in my face, bracing, and it makes me feel wild and free.

The valley is quiet in winter but it is never empty. The robin stays. You see the trails of smoke rising from the chimneys and the lights coming on in the houses across the valley like lanterns set out in the dark, and you know your neighbours are there. And on a clear night at the new moon the stars over the Mealagh Valley are breathtaking, a depth of dark sky that most people in this country no longer have anywhere near them. I love the hibernation of winter here, and I love it partly for the promise it carries of the season coming next.

Spring announces itself first in the hedgerows. The wild primroses come up yellow along the path when I am walking Aussie, and that is the first sign. The hare is out early in the season, crossing the frosty morning fields that I watch from the lounge windows. Green shoots show on the trees and the hedges. The skylarks and the cuckoos arrive in May. And when the clocks change I can follow the sunrise from my kitchen window as it climbs, just to the right of the Maughanaclea ridgeline. I want you to sit with that for a moment, because it matters: the ridge the turbines would stand on is the ridge I watch the sun come up beside every spring morning.

Spring is also when the Mealagh Valley gathers itself again. Our neighbours come from all around to the community hall, welcoming one another after the long quiet of winter, and there is an excitement in the voices and in the way people hold themselves, a knowledge that the longer, warmer days are on the way. The bursting of nature is felt keenly by everyone here. It is new life, and it is new hope, and it is shared.

Summer is the long, lazy stretch of the year. The walk becomes a meander. When the ground is dry enough Aussie and I go down onto the Mealagh Valley Loop Walk and take it slowly, through the ash, along by the river, through the fields. In the evenings the sunsets fall over Bantry Bay in purple and orange and red, like something out of a Monet, and we have barbecues in the neighbours' gardens a field or two over, and they gather in ours. We watch the sun go down and then light a garden fire and sit on into the night until the stars come out.

The Mealagh Valley is full of sound in summer, and this is something I particularly need you to understand. Sound carries an enormous distance here. I can stand in my garden and hear the neighbours' children playing, the hurling and the football, the squeals of delight and the laughter, from over a kilometre away, across the open fields. That is the kind of valley this is. It is also the reason I am genuinely afraid of what eighteen to twenty-four months of construction noise, of rock-breaking on that ridge, would do to this place, and afterwards what the turbines themselves would do, turning, night and day, in the quiet. I do not believe the noise assessment has properly reckoned with how this particular bowl of hills carries and holds sound. I am raising noise as a ground of my objection, plainly and deliberately.

There is a generosity to a Mealagh Valley summer that is hard to put a price on. The foxgloves come up in the hedgerows in early June and stay until the end of July, and that is the sure sign that summer has properly arrived. The grasses grow long and the hedgerows become heavy and full with the weight of their own foliage. We have a large pond and the dragonflies on it are huge, and the bees are all over the garden, and we are not unusual in that: most of the houses in this valley have a garden tended with real care, many of them with a pond, because the people here take pride in their outdoor spaces.

And there is the rhythm of the road. If I am out walking Aussie a neighbour will stop the car and we will talk, about the weather, about something coming up in the hall. Two neighbours might meet in their cars and simply stop and sit and talk, and if a third comes up behind, they wait, they do not lean on the horn, they let the conversation finish in its own time. That is not a small thing. That unhurriedness is the texture of the place, and it is exactly the kind of thing that a valley turned into a haulage route and a building site would lose.

Then the year winds down into autumn. The leaves crunch underfoot and Aussie bounds through them so they fluff up and spin at his fast feet. You begin to see your breath on the air, and the walks turn brisk and exhilarating. From our conservatory, which looks out over the floor of the valley, I watch the mist roll up off the river and settle low between the two sides of the valley, sitting in the basin of it in the early morning. The air smells of wet leaves and turned earth, nutty and earthy, real and raw. Autumn is not a melancholy season here, because it is the run-up to something: the long nights by the fire, Christmas, family coming home to the valley. It is an exciting time, the building of it.

And then it is winter again, and the wheel has come round, and every part of that year leans toward the next part. Nothing in it is endured. I have not described a place I put up with; I have described a place I love in every quarter of its year. That is why the proposed development frightens me in the way it does. It does not fall on one season. It falls on the whole turning wheel.

Turbines with a tip height of 169 metres, more than twice the height of the Great Pyramid of Giza, would stand on the ridgeline I walk toward every day, the ridge that runs on to the Kealkill Stone Circle, a monument that has stood in this landscape for thousands of years and is protected by Preservation Order. Aviation lighting on those turbines would burn through the dark sky that is one of the last genuinely dark skies left to people in this country. The Cork County Development Plan recognises the Mealagh Valley as a scenic and sensitive rural landscape and undertakes to protect it; this development runs against that undertaking. The construction would not interrupt the life of the valley. It would overpower it. We would be transported, for two years and then permanently, from an idyllic valley into a building site and the industrial structure it leaves behind. The Mealagh Valley would be lost to industrialisation.

I am asking An Coimisiún Pleanála to refuse permission for this development. I am asking you to let the Mealagh Valley keep its peace, keep its beauty, keep its seasons.

Yours sincerely,

Amy Carter-O'Sullivan

Moonlands, Laharanshermeen, Bantry, Co. Cork, P75 P599

Sources cited

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