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20 May 2026

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

RE: OBJECTION TO PROPOSED MAUGHANACLEA WIND FARM

Planning reference: ACP-324165-26 / 324165

Distance from my home to the nearest proposed turbine: approximately 2 km

A Chara,

My name is Finbarr O'Sullivan. I am fifty years old. I was born and reared on a farm in the Mealagh Valley and I have lived my whole life in this place. I am a carpenter by trade and now work as a Project Manager for an Energy efficiency Solutions Company going from house to house in West Cork doing domestic retrofits to help helping people upgrade their homes so they use less energy.

I served as chairperson of the Mealagh Valley Community Centre for ten years. I have three children: one in college, one sitting the Leaving Cert next year, and the youngest starting secondary school this September.

I am writing in my own name to object to the proposed Maughanaclea wind farm. I ask the Commission to refuse permission for the reasons I set out below.

THE LANDSCAPE.

The proposed development would place fourteen turbines on the ridgeline that shapes my view, my neighbours' views, and the views of every person who walks this valley. Each turbine has a tip height of 169 metres. To put that in plain terms, that is more than twice the height of the floodlights at Croke Park. Fourteen of them, side by side, on a ridge above a small, quiet valley.

From my home in Laharanshermeen the ridge is the line that closes the sky to the north. It is what I have looked at every morning of my life.

The Cork County Development Plan 2022 to 2028 designates this area as a High Value Landscape and a Highly Sensitive Landscape, and the Plan is explicit that this category of landscape carries the strongest level of protection against inappropriate development. A fourteen-turbine industrial wind farm on its highest ridge is the very definition of inappropriate.

The developer's own Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment records significant visual effects at multiple viewpoints around the Mealagh Valley, with substantial magnitudes of change predicted. That is the developer's own conclusion in their own document. It is not a matter for argument.

The Valley and the Walks

Saint Finbarr's Pilgrimage Path and the Mealagh Valley Loop Walk pass through my own land. People come here from every corner of Ireland and from abroad to walk that route.

They come for what is here - unspoilt natural scenery, quietness, the sound of running water, the call of birds, the open sky. They do not come to look at an industrial wind farm. The proposed turbines will be visible from long stretches of the walk and the noise from them will carry across the valley floor. The developer's Cultural Heritage chapter admits visual impacts on the pilgrimage route that cannot be mitigated. Cannot be mitigated means cannot be fixed. That is the developer telling the Commission, in their own document, that they will damage this asset and they have no way of putting it back. The Mealagh Valley Loop is a registered route within the wider Wild Atlantic Way tourism corridor, which Fáilte Ireland's own 2024 ten-year impact study values at over three billion euro per year to communities along the western seaboard (see source E). Damaging this walk is not a small matter.

THE CUMULATIVE PICTURE.

There are already wind farms operating, permitted, and proposed in the wider area around the Mealagh and Sheep's Head Peninsula. If every proposed scheme in the surrounding hills were granted, a person standing in the middle of this valley would be encircled by industrial turbines on every horizon.

The developer's Cumulative Impact Assessment does not properly capture that effect. It looks at each scheme in isolation, or in narrow bilateral combinations, and does not address what it feels like to live inside a ring of turbines.

West Cork is being asked to carry a wholly disproportionate share of the State's onshore wind development burden. That is not a fair distribution of the load. It is the offloading of the load onto the smallest and quietest communities because they are the easiest to roll over.

RESIDENTIAL AMENITY AND PROPERTY VALUE.

My home is approximately two kilometres from the nearest proposed turbine.

The peace and quiet that we have here is not a luxury. It is the reason we are here.

It is what I was given as a child and what I had hoped to hand on to my own three children.

The construction phase is acknowledged in the developer's own application to last 18 to 24 months.

That is two years of heavy haulage on small local roads, two years of dust, two years of generators and reversing alarms, and most of all two years of rock breaking.

The Maughanaclea ridge is bedrock under shallow peat. Rock breaking on that ridge will echo down into this valley day after day.

On property value, the evidence from Irish hedonic pricing research is consistent. The most recent Irish study, by Gillespie and McHale at the University of Galway's CERIS centre, found that homes within one kilometre of large wind farms in the west of Ireland lost on average 14.7 per cent of their value, with measurable effects extending well beyond one kilometre (see source A).

A decade of work as an energy assessor has taken me into the kitchens of hundreds of West Cork households, and I can tell the Commission that the family home is, for most people in this valley, by far their largest single asset.

The State should not casually permit a private developer to destroy a significant fraction of that asset for every household within sight and earshot of these machines.

PEAT, BOG, AND THE BIODIVERSITY THAT DEPENDS ON THEM.

The site is on peat. The application is honest enough to admit that, even after the most careful construction methods, there will be a permanent, significant residual effect on Annex I Upland Blanket Bog. That is a habitat of European importance and the developer is telling the Commission they will damage it and the damage cannot be undone. The lessons of Derrybrien in Galway, which led to the European Court of Justice judgment in Case C-261/18 are still recent enough that no Irish planning authority should approve a large windfarm on a peat-dominated ridge without the most exacting baseline monitoring of the peat depth, the slope angle, and the hydrology, none of which the EIAR provides at the level of detail that the seriousness of the decision requires (see source B).

Beyond the peat itself, the site is home to or used by a range of protected species: pine marten, red squirrel, Irish hare, and the catchments downstream support freshwater pearl mussel. These animals do not respect a wind farm boundary line. The fragmentation of habitat that comes with access tracks, borrow pits, hard standings, and a substation does not stop at the site fence.

The Irish research by Fernández-Bellón and colleagues at University College Cork found significantly reduced bird densities at wind farms compared with control sites, with the strongest effects closest to turbines and additional landscape-scale effects on open-habitat species (see source C).

THE BIRDS.

The White-Tailed Sea Eagle has been recorded in this area. The Hen Harrier, an Annex I species in serious decline in Ireland, is using the wider uplands around the Mealagh and the Sheep's Head. Peregrine Falcons hunt these ridges. The European Court of Justice held in *Commission v Ireland*, Case C-418/04, that the protection given to Annex I species applies whether or not the area in which the species occurs has been formally designated as a Special Protection Area. That is settled law. The bird survey effort in the EIAR is, in seasonal coverage is incomplete, and the methodology relies heavily on the absence of confirmed nest sites within the development footprint, which is not the test the case law sets.

PRIVATE WELLS AND WATER.

Our household water comes from a private well. Many of our neighbours' households are the same. Shallow gravity wells in this kind of terrain are particularly vulnerable to disturbance during heavy construction: vibration from rock breaking, dewatering at borrow pits, sediment loading from earthworks, and altered runoff patterns on steep slopes. The EIAR contains no baseline testing of private wells in the area.

Without that baseline, no one will be able to prove later that their well was clean before the construction began. That is not a fair position to put householders in.

Baseline testing of every private domestic well within a defined radius should have been completed before this application was made.

Dark Skies

Each of the fourteen turbines will carry red aviation warning lights at the nacelle. From the floor of this valley, on a clear night, you can see the Milky Way with the naked eye. That is not an exaggeration. It is the ordinary experience of living here. The peer-reviewed work by Bará and Lima (2024) at the University of Santiago de Compostela demonstrates that medium-intensity wind farm aviation lights can be brighter than Venus, the brightest planet in the night sky, at distances of up to around four kilometres, and remain detectable at the limit of unaided vision out to tens of kilometres (see source D).

Once those lights are installed, there is no closing them off again at night. They will be the dominant feature of every night sky in the Mealagh and beyond for the operational life of the development.

The Programme for Government 2025 contains a commitment to expand Ireland's Dark Sky Reserves.

Approving this application is directly at odds with that commitment.

Wild Hideaways, just east of my home, has built a registered tourism business on the darkness of this valley. That business does not survive the lighting of this ridge.

HEALTH, NOISE, AND THE TERRAIN.

The peer-reviewed literature on wind turbine noise and human health is consistent on certain points. A systematic review by Onakpoya and colleagues at the University of Oxford concluded that wind turbine noise is associated with increased risk of annoyance and sleep disturbance, with the strongest effects on people living closest to the turbines (see source F).

The WHO Environmental Noise Guidelines for the European Region (2018) make a conditional recommendation that average wind turbine noise levels should not exceed 45 dB Lden because of the documented adverse health effects above that threshold (see source G).

The Maughanaclea site is a ridge above a valley. The peer-reviewed sound propagation work by Van Renterghem (2017) at Ghent University, published in the Royal Society's Philosophical Transactions A, demonstrates that the standard flat-ground noise propagation models routinely used in wind farm noise assessments do not accurately predict received sound levels when the source is a wind turbine on a ridge and the receiver is across a valley (see source H).

The valley acts to focus and channel sound in ways that standard models underestimate. The complex hilly terrain of the Mealagh Valley has not been adequately captured in the developer's noise model.

Night-time noise, low-frequency content, and amplitude modulation, each of which is recognised in the IOA AMWG 2016 methodology, are not adequately addressed (see source I).

The background noise measurements appear to have been taken at locations that do not represent the quietest receptors, including the eco-retreat properties. The construction phase rock breaking will compound all of this for 18 to 24 months. I raise noise as a substantive ground of objection.

PLANNING PROCESS AND DEVELOPER CONDUCT.

The developer's engagement with this community has not been transparent. I attended consultation events at which information about turbine sizes, borrow pit locations, road works on the R586, and construction phasing was either incomplete or has changed since.

In my ten years chairing the Mealagh Valley Community Centre, I dealt with statutory bodies, local authority officials, community grant schemes and contractors of every description. This developer has not approached me or offered any reassurances to the community of the impact of this development.

SAFETY: LANDSLIDE AND HEAVY HAULAGE.

Construction of large turbine bases on steep peaty slopes carries a real and well-documented landslide risk. The Derrybrien peat slide in October 2003 caused environmental damage that took years to address and led to the European Court of Justice judgment against the State.

The R586 and the local roads off it are not designed for sustained heavy haulage of the kind that delivering fourteen turbines requires: each blade alone is over 70 metres long. The roads in and out of the Mealagh are narrow, winding, with poor verges, and shared with school traffic, agricultural machinery, and pedestrians.

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP AND BENEFIT.

This development is not community-owned. The profits leave the area and the community is offered, in exchange, a Community Benefit Fund which is wholly inadequate compensation for what is being taken. As someone who has spent ten years organising community projects in this valley, visiting elderly neighbours, and helping run a community hall on voluntary subscriptions, I can say plainly: a sum of money handed down from a developer to a community fund does not buy meaningful consent for the permanent industrialisation of the landscape that community lives in. The community of the Mealagh Valley has not consent to this development.

Climate Sighting and the Wider Question

I want to be clear with the Commission that I support climate action. I spend my working week assessing homes for energy efficiency and helping people apply for SEAI grants to reduce their fossil fuel consumption and improve their energy efficiency. I understand that renewable energy is part of the answer. But renewable energy must be sited where it does the least harm, not where it is cheapest for a private developer to build.

Offshore wind, large-scale rooftop and ground-mounted solar on industrial sites, brownfield onshore wind, and a serious programme of grid investment can deliver renewable capacity without destroying Annex I peatland, registered monuments, dark skies, pilgrimage walks, and the quality of life of every household within several kilometres of the Maughanaclea ridge.

Picking a small community in West Cork to absorb fourteen 169-metre turbines is the easy answer, not the right one.

CONCLUSION.

I am a custodian of this place. So was my father, and his father before him. I hope that my three children will continue to do so after me. The duty of a custodian is to hand on to the next generation what the last generation handed on, as nature intended it, unspoilt. That duty is not something I made up. It is the oldest law of the Irish countryside and it is the deepest reason for this objection.

I ask An Coimisiún Pleanála, in the strongest terms to refuse permission for the proposed Maughanaclea wind farm.

Mise le meas,

Finbarr O'Sullivan

Laharanshermeen, Mealagh Valley, Bantry, Co. Cork, P75 WK40

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