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

Planning Application Reference Number: ACP-324165-26
Applicant: Maughanaclea Ltd aka Enerco
Description of Development: Construction of 14 Industrial Wind Turbines
Maughanaclea
Location: Maughanaclea, County Cork

Dear Sirs

I am writing to object to the proposed Maughanaclea Wind Farm Development.

Although I now live at Coolcaha, Ballydehob, I formerly lived in Maughanaclea and still feel a strong connection to the area and surrounding landscape. Even after many years, it remains one of the parts of West Cork that I associate most with peace, remoteness and natural beauty. It is an area that still feels genuinely rural and relatively untouched, and I believe that is something increasingly rare and valuable.

I appreciate that Ireland faces major challenges in relation to energy and climate policy. However, I do not believe that developments of this scale are the right solution, particularly in landscapes as sensitive and unspoilt as Maughanaclea and the wider West Cork uplands. In my opinion, too much emphasis is being placed on large commercial wind developments while too little consideration is being given to the long term impact on rural communities, landscapes, wildlife and quality of life.

The proposed turbines are extremely large structures- almost 2.5 times the size of the Elysian- currently the largest building in Cork. They are far larger than any of the turbines present in the existing wind farms of West Cork, and there are already plenty of them. The sheer height of the turbines is difficult to comprehend until

compared with the scale of houses, trees and roads in the surrounding area. Even the applicant's own Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment acknowledges that the turbines would become the "most prominent element" within the landscape. I believe that statement alone demonstrates the scale of change being proposed.

This is not an ordinary rural landscape. The Mealagh Valley area falls within Landscape Character Area 15a: Ridged and Peaked Uplands, which is identified in the Cork County Development Plan as having High Landscape Value and High Landscape Sensitivity. The area around Maughanaclea still feels quiet, open and largely untouched compared to many other parts of the country. Once you get up into the hills and smaller roads around the valley, there is a real sense of space and remoteness that is becoming harder to find. It remains one of my favourite areas for hiking.

The applicant's own documentation describes the area as "remote, sparsely populated" and characterised by "a sense of remoteness and isolation." In my opinion, those are not weaknesses in the landscape; they are exactly the qualities that make it special. The Maughanaclea and Mealagh valleys may not have a high population density, but they are active and bonded communities (Mealagh valley residents came together to build their own community centre, for example). And life in these quiet, peaceful places is hardly 'remote' – they are less than 30 minutes drive from the lively market town of Bantry. These special characteristics of 'remoteness and isolation' would be fundamentally damaged by the introduction of fourteen 169m turbines, extensive access roads, excavation works, drainage works and associated infrastructure.

I do not believe the visual impact of this development can be understated. The turbines would dominate skylines and ridgelines over a very large area of West Cork and permanently alter the landscape. The developer repeatedly refers to screening, containment, route analysis, mitigation and micro-siting in order to reduce visual impact. To me, that only highlights how visually intrusive the proposal actually is. If a development depends on surrounding mountains and hills partially hiding it from view, then that strongly suggests the landscape is not naturally suitable for infrastructure of this scale. There is no effective way of 'screening' a development of this scale, when the turbines dwarf existing homes, trees, mountains even! The visual impact is not only during the daytime; the night skies will also be ruined by the presence of multiple red lights on top of the turbines.

I am especially concerned about the impact on the R585, which is a designated scenic route through one of the most beautiful parts of West Cork. This route is valued by residents and visitors alike because of the open views, upland scenery and rural nature of the area. The introduction of turbines of this scale would fundamentally alter the experience of travelling through this landscape.

The site also lies within the wider Wild Atlantic Way region, which is internationally promoted as a place to experience nature, scenery and unspoilt landscapes. West Cork's tourism economy depends heavily on people coming here for walking, cycling, wildlife, scenery and the sense of escape from urban and industrial environments. The area is also covered by the Fáilte Ireland West Cork Coast

Destination and Experience Development Plan, which places significant emphasis on landscape, heritage and authentic visitor experience.

I believe developments of this scale are incompatible with the image of West Cork that tourism bodies themselves are trying to promote. Visitors do not come to West Cork to experience large scale turbine developments spreading across remote upland landscapes - they come because it still feels open, peaceful and relatively wild. Hiking trails have been developed across the area in recent years, no doubt with Cork County Council funding, such as the St Finbarrs Pilgrim route, which would be ruined by this development.

I am also increasingly concerned about the cumulative effect of turbine development across the West Cork countryside. One wind farm on its own may be presented as manageable, but taken together with existing and proposed developments across the region, there is a growing sense that the uplands of West Cork are gradually losing the natural character that makes them so distinctive. There comes a point where the landscape simply cannot absorb further large-scale development without fundamentally changing its identity. It is my opinion that we have already reached this point.

Importantly, the Cork County Development Plan does not identify this area as "Acceptable in Principle" for wind energy development. Instead, it is categorised as "Open to Consideration". In my understanding, that means the burden rests firmly on the developer to demonstrate that unacceptable impacts on landscape, tourism, biodiversity and residential amenity can genuinely be avoided. I do not believe that burden has been met in this case.

I am also deeply concerned about the impact on biodiversity and wildlife. These uplands support important habitats and are home to many protected species of birds, bats, amphibians, mammals and insects associated with peatland and rough upland landscapes. Large-scale construction involving turbine foundations, road building, excavation, drainage works and forestry clearance will inevitably disturb habitats and wildlife, even where mitigation measures are proposed.

The scale of engineering works proposed is also difficult to reconcile with the idea that this is a low impact development. Wind farms are often presented as environmentally benign, but in reality they involve very substantial concrete foundations, major excavation works, extensive access roads and significant alteration of sensitive upland environments.

There are also concerns regarding peat stability, drainage and hydrology. Disturbance of peatland areas carries obvious risks in terms of sediment release, drainage changes and downstream water quality impacts. Given the scale of excavation and construction proposed, I do not believe these risks should be minimised.

Residential amenity is another major concern. Separation distances alone do not remove the lived impact of turbines of this scale. Fourteen turbines of almost 169 metres in height would create an overbearing presence for nearby homes, not only

because of their size, but because of their movement, visibility, lighting and industrial character.

This is currently a quiet rural environment. People living in and around Maughanaclea do not simply occupy houses on a map; they live in and enjoy a landscape that forms part of their daily quality of life. The peace, darkness, quietness and sense of rural sanctuary are all part of residential amenity and should be treated as such.

The applicant's own EIAR identifies population, human health, residential amenity, visual amenity, noise, shadow flicker and cumulative effects as matters requiring assessment. The HSE also specifically requested consideration of noise and vibration, shadow flicker, cumulative impacts and wider determinants of health and wellbeing. These are clearly recognised concerns and not simply matters being raised casually by residents.

I am also concerned about the impact this development would have on nearby residents and on the quiet rural character of the area generally. Even where official limits are technically complied with, turbines of this scale inevitably change the experience of living in a rural landscape through their visibility, movement, lighting and noise.

In a quiet upland setting where background noise levels are naturally low, I do not believe the real lived impact on nearby communities can be fully captured through technical modelling alone. I am also concerned that cumulative impacts on residential amenity have not been fully addressed in relation to existing and proposed turbine developments in the wider area.

Finally, I feel there is a wider issue regarding the direction of energy policy in rural Ireland. There is an increasing perception that rural communities and landscapes are expected to absorb the visual and environmental burden of large scale turbine developments while receiving no direct benefit in return, apart from payments to the landowners in question. This alone creates division in a rural community, where the majority of residents oppose a development yet just one or two individuals stand to gain financially.

Enerco's industrial wind developments are subsidised by Irish taxpayers and paid for by the Irish communities & ecosystems these wind farms destroy. But the energy produced by these turbines is not bound for Irish households, it will go to European data centres. The profits go, not to local communities or to the Irish state, but to huge multinational corporations backing Enerco. There is growing public concern that increasing energy demand from large-scale data-centre expansion is driving the pressure for developments of this scale.

Overall, I believe this proposal represents a significant and irreversible change to one of the most scenic, peaceful and environmentally sensitive parts of West Cork – this change is effectively permanent.

For all of these reasons, I respectfully request that permission for the proposed development be refused.

Yours faithfully,

FIONA ASHLEY