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The Secretary

An Coimisiún Pleanála

64 Marlborough Street

Dublin 1, D01 V902

Re: Submission of observation, Proposed Maughanaclea Wind Farm, Planning

Reference ACP-324165-26 / 324165

To whom it may concern,

I am eighteen years old and I have grown up in the Mealagh Valley. My home, at the address above, is less than two kilometres from the nearest of the proposed Maughanaclea turbines. I am writing this submission myself, in my own words, because the place this development would damage is the only home I have ever known, and because the things it would damage cannot be put back.

I want to be honest about what I am asking the Commission to do. I am not asking you to refuse this project because of some abstract harm in the distance. I am asking you to refuse it because of harms that are specific, well evidenced, and concentrated on a small valley that is already carrying more than its share.

what the valley is

The Mealagh Valley is not a generic stretch of West Cork hillside. It is a quiet, undeveloped place, hemmed in by the ridge that the developer wants to plant turbines on. We have no street lights. The loudest sound at our house most nights is the wind through the trees and, in summer, the river. On a clear night you can see the Milky Way from our front garden. None of that is exaggeration. It is the daily experience of living here.

The proposed turbines would be 169 metres tall to blade tip. That is more than twice the height of Capital Dock in Dublin, which is the tallest residential building in the country. Multiple machines that size, set on the ridge that frames our valley, would not be a feature of the landscape. They would be the landscape. The visual character of this place, which is the protected basis of the Cork County Development Plan policies for the area, would be replaced.
noise

I want this point recorded clearly. The terrain between the proposed turbines and my home is exactly the terrain that the standard noise models handle worst. The turbines would sit on a ridge above our valley. Sound from a ridge mounted turbine does not behave the way sound from a turbine on flat ground behaves. Van Renterghem (2017), modelling this exact

geometry, found that for a single ridge mounted turbine the threshold below which adverse noise effects are not generally found can extend hundreds of metres into the valley before the sound falls off, and that the valley shape and ground type produce focusing and shielding effects that simple flat ground predictions do not capture (see source A). The developer's

noise assessment relies on those simpler predictions.

On top of that, the systematic review by Onakpoya and colleagues (2015) found that wind turbine noise annoyance is significantly more pronounced in quiet areas than in already noisy ones, and that self-reported sleep disturbance increases with proximity (see source B). This valley is one of the quiet areas the review is talking about. Eighteen to twenty four months of rock breaking in the borrow pits, echoing back from the opposite slope, is not a minor inconvenience. It is a continuous insult to a soundscape that took centuries to settle. bats, birds and the things you do not put back.

This is the part I feel most strongly about, and the part the EIAR treats most thinly. On summer evenings the bats come out over the garden in numbers. In the mornings the dawn chorus from the hedges and scrub around our house is the first thing I hear. That is not decoration. It is a working ecosystem that has been allowed to remain intact because nothing this large has ever been built here.

Aviation lighting on the turbines will run through every hour of darkness for the lifetime of the development. Bará and Lima (2024) show that medium intensity turbine obstruction lights can be brighter than Venus to an observer up to about four kilometres away, brighter than the brightest star in the night sky to about ten kilometres, and visible to the unaided eye out to about thirty eight kilometres under typical conditions (see source C). At our distance of under two kilometres the lights would be unavoidable, every night, in every view from our property. They would also bleed into the habitat used by the bats, the moths the bats feed on, and the night active birds of the area. Artificial light at this intensity is a documented stressor on nocturnal wildlife, and once the lights are installed they cannot be undone for the operational life of the wind farm.

Fernández Bellón and colleagues (2019), in Ireland, found total bird densities lower at wind farms than at matched control sites, with the greatest reductions close to turbines, and effects mediated by the habitat changes that wind farm construction itself causes (see source D). That is the dawn chorus I am talking about. It is not protected by the EIAR's mitigation language. It is protected by leaving the site alone.

water

Our household water comes from a private well. There has been no baseline testing of that well, or of any private supply in the valley that I am aware of, before the proposed disturbance of peat soils and the ridge upslope of us. If the supply is fouled or lost during construction, the question of who pays to put it right, and how quickly, is not something I have seen the developer answer in any useful detail. The standard for protecting a domestic water supply from a project of this scale is not modelled assurance. It is baseline data, real time monitoring, and a clear contingency.

a place that is already carrying enough

West Cork is being asked, application after application, to host an outsized share of Ireland's onshore wind development. I am not anti renewable. I am the generation that will have to live with the results of the climate decisions being taken now. But it is not honest to call this project the answer to the climate problem. The right places for new generation at this scale are sites that do not trade one irreplaceable thing, intact upland habitat and dark sky, for another, low carbon electricity. Offshore, repowering of existing sites, rooftop solar, and grid investment all

do that better. This site does not.

dark skies and what they are worth

Fáilte Ireland's 2019 feasibility study identified West Cork as one of the stretches of the Wild Atlantic Way with high quality dark skies and identified the protection of those skies as essential to the development of dark sky tourism along the route (see source E). The Galloway Forest Park assessment cited in that work showed that for every pound spent on dark sky friendly lighting in a designated area there was almost a doubling in return through tourism, and that after ten years the park was generating around half a million pounds a year from dark sky tourism alone (see source F). Aviation lighting on a wind farm on the ridge above the Mealagh Valley does not co exist with that future. It forecloses it.

the prehistoric monuments

The developer's own Cultural Heritage assessment accepts that the visual impact on the prehistoric monument cluster in this area cannot be mitigated. That is their own conclusion, not mine. A monument that has stood for several thousand years derives its meaning in part from its setting. Once that setting is industrialised by structures the height of an office tower on the skyline, the setting is gone. Mitigation, in that context, is not a real word.

closing

I have tried to keep this short and to the point. I am asking the Commission to refuse permission for the Maughanaclea Wind Farm as applied for. The harms are concentrated, evidenced, and in several categories permanent. The benefits accrue almost entirely outside the community that absorbs the cost. The site is the wrong site.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Yours faithfully,

Isabella Estie

Ardrah East, Mealagh Valley, Bantry, Co. Cork, P75 WP58

Approximate distance to nearest proposed turbine: less than 2 km

Sources cited

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