22nd of May 2026

Kevin McDonnell
The Cabin
Maughanaclea
Kealkill
Co Cork
P75 DN34

Planning Application Reference: PAX04.324165

Applicant: Maughanaclea Ltd / Enerco
Development: Maughanaclea Wind Farm (14 turbines and associated infrastructure)
Location: Ardrah, Maughanaclea, Ballynamought, Gortloughra, Cousane, Coomclogh, Derragh, Glanycarney, Keenrath, Derrynacaheragh, Shiplough, Coolsnaghtig and other townlands Co. Cork

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Dear Sir/Madam,

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

I live at H019, very close to where a number of the turbines are proposed. I moved here from Drogheda to live in a quieter, more rural place, and that choice was very deliberate. It's the kind of environment I was looking for.

I live here with my partner, Sophie Seymour, who has made her own separate submission. While this is my own objection, I share many of the same concerns, particularly about what this development would mean in day to day terms.

I've recently finished a degree in archaeology, and that has definitely influenced how I see this landscape. One of the main reasons I chose to live here is because of how intact it still feels, both in terms of its history and its overall character.

I am also an avid bird watcher.

Archaeology and the Landscape

West Cork has a very high concentration of archaeological sites, with over 19,000 recorded monuments across the county. This area forms part of that wider archaeological landscape, but what is particularly notable here is not just the number of sites, but how they relate to each other.

The Mealagh Valley and surrounding uplands contain one of the richest concentrations of prehistoric monuments in Ireland, something that is reflected in the

developer's own EIAR. Within the proposed wind farm site itself, 11 recorded archaeological sites are identified, with a further 210 sites within 5 km and 6 National Monuments within 10 km of the proposed turbines.

From an archaeological perspective, these sites cannot be understood in isolation. Monuments such as stone circles, standing stones, and cairns were deliberately positioned in relation to surrounding topography, skylines, and in some cases to each other. Their significance is therefore tied not only to their physical remains, but to their wider setting, intervisibility, and the experience of the landscape as a whole.

A nearby example is the Kealkill Stone Circle complex, which includes a stone circle, cairn, and standing stones, and is protected under Preservation Order PO 69/1938. Its placement within the landscape is clearly intentional, with views to surrounding hills forming part of its significance. The developer's Cultural Heritage assessment accepts that the proposed turbines will have visual impacts on this setting and that these impacts cannot be mitigated. From an archaeological point of view, that is a significant impact.

The site is also crossed by the historic Butter Road, associated with the Cork Butter Exchange. This is part of the historic movement network through the area and contributes to the time-depth of the landscape. Its permanent alteration would further erode the historic character of the area.

The wider importance of this landscape has long been recognised. Archaeologist Tony Miller has described it as "one of the richest clusters of prehistoric monuments in Ireland." David Myler's 1998 publication, *An Archaeological Survey of the Mealagh Valley*, identified approximately 90 sites in the valley, many of which were first recorded during that survey, with the likelihood that additional sites remain undiscovered. This reinforces the understanding of the area as a coherent archaeological landscape rather than a collection of isolated features.

Concerns of impacts on White-tailed Eagles raised by the Minister for Nature, Heritage and Biodiversity have not been addressed in the EIAR.

As per EIAR Chapter 7 Ornithology Table 7-1 Consultation responses related to ornithology: the Minister has specifically advised the applicant to fully assess the project in view of the re-introduced White-tailed sea eagle, a species listed in Annex I of the EU Birds Directive (Council Directive 2009/147/EC).

Wind turbines pose a severe collision risk to the recovering White-Tailed Eagle population, with collision fatalities documented globally. The most high profile documented incidents have occurred at major wind farms in Ireland[1,2], Scotland[3] and Norway[4].

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[1] https://www.independent.ie/county/kerry/three-eagles-killed-by-wind-turbines-in-kerry/a/133482018.html

[2] https://www.donegaldaily.com/lead-stories/three-white-tailed-eagles-killed-by-wind-turbines-in-south-donegal-1-609472

[3] https://www.nature.scot/doc/freedom-information-request-deaths-birds-prey-scotland-windfarms

[4] Dahl, E.L., et al. Reduced breeding success in white-tailed eagles at Smøla windfarm, western Norway, is caused by mortality and displacement. Biol. Conserv. (2011), doi:10.1016/j.biocon.2011.10.012

The direct and cumulative impacts from Maughanaclea Wind Farm and several other windfarms within Co. Cork and Co. Kerry and elsewhere could potentially have a substantial negative effect on the White-tailed eagle breeding population. The Minister stated in the scoping response that existing and proposed adjacent windfarms could add to the cumulative risk of collision and narrow a potential corridor of flight activity (directional flight, social behaviour, and soaring) and this factor should be considered during the collision and mortality risk assessment for the project. The Minister specifically required the examination of microsite susceptibility to generating **'orographic lift'** which may attract eagles into the rotor-swept zones of these turbines, however this is not mentioned in the EIAR outwith the scoping response.

The data obtained by the applicant provides two observations of White-tailed Eagle from surveys. The National Parks and Wildlife Service has invested significantly in the reintroduction programme and over 150 released and wild born White-tailed Eagles have been fitted with satellite tags. The applicant has not obtained high resolution state agency data for assessment or analysis in the EIAR in relation to White-tailed Eagle for the development and its sphere of influence.

In the absence of any assessment of orographic lift or temporospatial analysis of GPS data that could support and corroborate the conclusions by the applicant, the EIAR has lacunae and lacks complete, precise and definitive findings and conclusions capable of removing all reasonable scientific doubt of impacts on White-tailed Eagle. In Environmental Impact Assessment case law, dealing with insufficient or missing data usually triggers the Precautionary Principle. An Coimisiún Pleanála does not possess objective data that can cleanly rule out significant effects. If an authority cannot rule out significant environmental effects due to objective data gaps, they must either legally require the developer to supply additional information or refuse planning consent.

Loss and deterioration of Annex I habitats outside of designated European Sites.

Page 30 of the EIAR clearly shows turbine locations on Annex I habitats as per National Parks and Wildlife Service data. Pages 41 – 47 of the EIA clearly show turbine locations on habitats corresponding with Annex I habitats. The EIAR uses terminology and bespoke criterion to describe and minimise any sense of conservation value of these Annex I habitats that will be lost to development e.g. "fragmented" and "degraded". This in sharp contrast to the same Annex I habitats that have been "deliberately avoided in the design".

Regulation 27(4)(b) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477/2011) places a strict legal duty on all public authorities to avoid the pollution or deterioration of protected natural habitats. This

specific regulation acts to fully transpose the final sentence of Article 4(4) of the EU Birds Directive.

Concerns of impacts on wintering Hen Harrier and adverse effects on site integrity of the Mullaghanish to Musheramore Special Protection Area (SPA).

The Irish Hen Harrier population is facing a severe conservation crisis, having declined by one-third (33%) between 2015 and 2022 to an estimated 85 to 106 breeding pairs. The species has suffered a significant long-term decline and faces potential extinction in Ireland within the next 25 years[5]. A considerable overlap exists between Hen Harrier breeding distribution and the location of wind farms in Ireland and the presence of wind farms is negatively related to Hen Harrier population trends[6].

During the breeding season in Ireland, Hen Harriers generally have a core foraging range of up to c.11 km from their nest sites[7]. The Natura Impact Statement (NIS) for Maughanaclea Wind Farm development states the breeding population of Hen Harrier in the Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains SPA (breeding population c. 3 pairs), located c.20km north-east of the development is not using the proposed wind farm site for breeding or provisioning.

However, the NIS concludes that there is “no potential for adverse effects on juveniles dispersing from the Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains SPA as a result of the Proposed Project”. Satellite tracking of Hen Harrier in Ireland has shown survival is low during this period of the species life history, with 76% of juveniles that initiate dispersal, and whose fate was known, died before settling on wintering grounds, with an overall first year survival of just 17.7 ± 7.5%. Approximately only 1 in 5 juvenile Hen Harrier in Ireland post fledging survive long enough to establish a core wintering area[8].

Low juvenile survival is an important factor in the documented Hen Harrier population decline. This is caused by a lack of food and by proxy, the availability, condition and cohesion of foraging habitats within core wintering ranges[8]. The applicant states “habitats utilised by Hen Harrier are not unique to the Proposed Wind Farm site and are abundant in the wider surroundings” and, “suitable habitat will remain available to overwintering Hen Harrier to continue to utilise the area for hunting”. If suitable habitat was abundant as the applicant states, then it is logical to

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[5] https://www.npws.ie/news/results-2022-national-hen-harrier-breeding-survey-now-published

[6] Wilson, M.W., Fernández-Bellon, D., Irwin, S. and O’Halloran, J., 2017. Hen Harrier Circus cyaneus population trends in relation to wind farms. Bird Study, 64(1), pp.20-29.

[7] Irwin, S., Wilson, M., O’Donoghue, B., O’Mahony, B., Kelly, T. and O’Halloran, J., 2012. Optimum scenarios for Hen Harrier conservation in Ireland. Coford, Final Report to DAFM.

deduce that Hen Harrier juvenile survival within the wider countryside should be higher than 1 in 5. Best scientific knowledge shows this is not the case.

Satellite tracking of Hen Harrier in Ireland has shown that the average foraging distance from winter roosts is 5.4km[8]. The NIS cites this study in Section 3.2.5.6. This study states core wintering areas should be considered when designing bird surveys as part of ecological assessments for large-scale developments, such as wind farms, in Hen Harrier wintering areas. The applicant has only undertaken Hen Harrier roost surveys within a 2km of the proposed development. This study also demonstrated that Hen Harriers that undertook sudden, long-distance dispersal tend to remain between 100km and 200km away from the natal area up to and during their first winter[8].

The NIS Section 3.2.5.4 states there was no evidence of roosting behaviour. However, the data submitted shows observations of Hen Harrier over the survey period. The respective drawing in Appendix 7-4 shows observed presence and activity during the winter period in a townland just outside the study area and a location with ideal roost habitat. Section 6.2.2.1.1 of the NIS states "Two birds were recorded possibly roosting together". This conflicting data/conclusions in the Appropriate Assessment does not meet the strict legal threshold of "best scientific knowledge". An Coimisiún Pleanála must ascertain the best scientific knowledge.

The applicant has presented conflicting scientific statement, evidence and reasoning and the competent authority cannot simply ignore the conflict. This conflict and lacunae is not inconsequential to the final conclusion of the NIS and is not a harmless error (within the meaning of CJEU Gemeinde Altrip, C-72/12).

The NIS Section 3.2.5.6 states "The estimated national wintering population of hen harrier in Ireland is 311-435 individuals, therefore 1% of the Republic of Ireland national wintering population is 3-4 birds. Thus, a regularly occurring wintering population of 3-4 hen harrier is required for classification as National Importance". The source of this estimate is not provided. The connotation of significance as measured in numbers of individuals impacted by development and the use of such an impact matrix or importance classification is irrelevant to the legal tests of Article 6(3).

In summary, Hen Harrier have been observed using the site (33 observations) and during winter – with all sex and age classes recorded during surveys - within the known average core winter foraging range for Hen Harrier (c.<5km) and within short dispersal distances of juvenile Hen Harrier (c.<25km) fledging from the Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains SPA. There is a clear pathway and link between the Special Conservation Interest of the SPA and the proposed development as per best

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[8] McCarthy, A. 2022. Seasonal ecology and the conservation of hen harriers (Circus cyaneus) in Ireland. PhD Thesis, University
College Cork. Irwin, S., Wilson, M., O'Donoghue, B., O'Mahony, B., Kelly, T. and O'Halloran, J., 2012. Optimum scenarios for Hen Harrier conservation in Ireland. Coford, Final Report to DAFM.

scientific knowledge. The EIAR states development for turbines and infrastructure will result in the loss of semi-natural habitats and protected Annex I habitats (irrespective of the applicants bespoke descriptions on condition) which correspond to Hen Harrier foraging habitat. The loss of habitat supporting the Special Conservation Interest of the Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains SPA outside its boundaries can still undermine the Site Specific Conservation Objectives for the SPA, notably Productivity rate (dictated by post-fledging survival; adult survival; and immigration and emigration rates) and vis-à-vis a feedback adverse effect on Population Size (birds returning to the natal area to breed in subsequent years).

Regulation 2(1) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477/2011) defines the concept of "Land functionally connected with a European Site". This refers to areas outside designated Natura 2000 boundaries that support the conservation objectives of those protected sites. Under Irish law, it is land linked by air, soil, hydrology, geology, ecology, or water that protected species depend on for survival. Even though a parcel of land is not formally designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Area (SPA), it is legally treated as an extension of that site for planning and development purposes. If a proposed development or activity impacts this connecting land, it can indirectly harm the protected site.

Under Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive, an adverse effect is considered significant if it undermines the Site Specific Conservation Objectives and structural integrity of a European Site "site integrity"—meaning it affects the lasting preservation of the site's favourable conservation status. The threshold for significance is exceedingly strict, as the Directive embeds the precautionary principle.

The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) has ruled that an adverse effect is significant if there is any remaining scientific uncertainty regarding the impacts and established critical case law defining this boundary[9,10].

There is reasonable scientific doubt and uncertainty/lacunae as to the status of roosting Hen Harrier and adverse effects to site integrity on the Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains SPA as a result of habitat loss and displacement through development of the wind farm, alone and in -combination with other wind farm developments.

The Appropriate Assessment /NIS does not contain complete, precise, and definitive conclusions capable of removing all reasonable scientific doubt about the effects of the development on the Special Conservation Interests of the Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains SPA. Under EU and Irish law, An Coimisiún Pleanála

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[9] Waddenzee, Case C-127/02. Link: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:62002CC0127

[10] Eco Advocacy, Case C-721/21 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:62021CJ0721

cannot lawfully consent to a development if the Appropriate Assessment (AA) is legally non-compliant.

Concerns about the EIAR

Having read the EIAR, it is clear that the developer accepts there will be negative impacts on archaeological sites, particularly in terms of their setting, and that these impacts will be long-term with no effective mitigation. However, these impacts are then downplayed, largely on the basis of distance. In my view, this does not adequately reflect how prehistoric sites function. Because these monuments were designed with reference to the wider landscape, development even at some distance can still have a significant effect on their setting.

A further concern is that the assessment considers sites individually rather than as part of a connected landscape. This approach does not capture the cumulative and relational nature of the archaeology in this area.

Overall, the proposed development would introduce large-scale, visually dominant structures into a landscape whose significance lies in its relative lack of modern intrusion and its strong archaeological coherence. This would result in a permanent change to the setting of multiple sites and to the integrity of the wider archaeological landscape.

Landscape and Character

One of the main reasons I live here is because the area still feels relatively untouched. It's quiet, open, and not dominated by large structures.

A development of this scale would change that quite significantly. Fourteen turbines, along with associated infrastructure, would alter the skyline and the overall character of the area. This wouldn't be a small or localised change, it would affect a wide landscape.

That change affects not just views, but how the place is experienced, including the setting of archaeological sites and the general sense of the area as somewhere rural and calm.

One of the things that makes this landscape distinctive is that it still retains a sense of continuity between its archaeology, topography and rural character. You can still understand how monuments relate to the surrounding hills, valleys and routes through the landscape. The introduction of turbines of this scale would fundamentally alter that relationship and change how the historic landscape is experienced.

Cumulative Impact

There are already wind farms in the wider area. While each one may be assessed on its own, the combined effect over time is what really matters.

Gradually, the landscape becomes more industrialised. From an archaeological point of view, that erodes the sense of a connected historic landscape and reduces what makes this area distinctive.

Day to Day Impact

On a personal level, this is a very quiet area, and that's something I really value. Sophie and I spend a lot of time walking in the surrounding area, and that's a big part of our daily routine. The calmness and lack of disturbance is one of the main reasons we live here.

Living this close to turbines, the combination of noise, constant movement, and shadow flicker would be very hard to ignore. Even if each of those things is considered acceptable individually, together they would change what it feels like to live here.

Sophie has explained in her own submission how sensitive she is to noise and visual disturbance, and I see how important a stable, quiet environment is for her wellbeing.

Final Point

The Non-Technical Summary presents the project in a generally positive way, focusing on renewable energy and benefits. However, when you look at the detail in the EIAR, it is clear that there will be long-term impacts on both the landscape and the setting of archaeological sites, and that these impacts cannot really be mitigated. That is not something that comes across clearly in the summary.

Conclusion

I chose to live here because of the quiet, the landscape, and the sense of history in the area.

The proposed development would change all of that in a way that feels permanent. For these reasons, I would ask that permission for the proposed wind farm be refused.

Kevin McDonnell
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Maughanaclea Stone Circle showing my home and rural location in the background, and where 3 turbines will be visible.