# Submission of Observations

An Coimisiún Pleanála

Case reference: ACP-324165-26 (324165)

Proposed Maughanaclea Wind Farm, Co. Cork

**From:** Noel Burke

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**Distance from nearest proposed turbine:** approximately 6 km

Dear Members of the Commission,

I am writing as a long-standing resident of the Mealagh Valley to object to the proposed Maughanaclea Wind Farm. I ask that this objection be considered in full, and I ask that permission be refused.

*The valley as I first saw it.* The first time I came to the Mealagh Valley was in 1979, to look at a house that was for sale, which we subsequently bought. I remember the view distinctly. The end of the valley extended in front of me, the ridgelines unbroken, the silence so complete you could hear the river from the road. That is the place we chose, and that is the place we have lived in and worked in for nearly half a century. I cannot understand how this same valley can now be allowed to be industrialised and destroyed forever. The Mealagh Valley, and the Kealkill Valley running back to the Cousane Gap on the R584, will never be the same after being ravaged by these structures.

*The house we built ourselves.* Our house is self-designed and built with materials handpicked locally: stone from the surrounding hillside, wood from recycled timber frame panels, and beams and posts from locally sourced trees. A curved green roof sits atop those hand-crafted wooden beams, designed to emulate the rolls and curves of the landscape so that the building seems to settle into the hill rather than sit on top of it. Every choice in that house, from the materials to the orientation, was made in deference to the place it stands in. To then have that same landscape overshadowed by fourteen industrial turbines, each one 169 metres to blade tip, is, in my view, criminal. For scale: one of these turbines would stand taller than the Great Pyramid of Giza, which is roughly 139 metres at its apex. There would be fourteen of them, set on a ridge directly above us.

*The view from our guests' windows.* My wife and I run an Airbnb accommodation for up to seven people across two separate lets. One of those lets looks directly onto the Maughanaclea Hills, where eight of the proposed turbines are to be sited. Up until now, almost every guest comments on the unspoiled view. That is what they come for, and that is what they pay for. Photographs of the view in the direction of the proposed turbine ridgeline, and of the house in its setting, are appended to this submission for the Commission's reference. I am afraid this proposed development will permanently damage what we offer, and with it the income we depend on. The red aviation lights at night will further ruin the dark skies that our guests, and we ourselves, treasure. There is now substantial peer-reviewed evidence that the night-time visibility of wind farm aviation lights extends to very large distances from the turbines themselves and significantly degrades the perceived darkness of the sky over a wide area (see source A). Once those lights are switched on, the Mealagh Valley will no longer be a dark-sky place. The economic value of dark skies for rural accommodation providers such as ourselves is well established in tourism research (see source B), and Fáilte Ireland has itself identified dark-sky assets as a strategic tourism opportunity for areas like West Cork. The loss is not abstract. It is bookings, reviews, repeat custom, and a livelihood.

*A landmark I look for every day.* Having walked the entire perimeter of the uplands of Bantry Bay, from Dursey Head to the Sheep's Head, over the last forty years, it pains me deeply to think of what might be coming down the line. Every day I am out, I look for Nowen Hill on the horizon as a landmark for home. It is a familiar shape, a known thing, the way other people know the face of a person they love. To picture that hill, and the ridges beside it, fitted out with rotating industrial machinery and red flashing lights, is to picture something gone. Right now I can name the wind energy developments already in train within sight of my home: Curraglass and Derreenacrinnig West, which have planning and are under appeal; the proposed Maughanaclea and Coomclogh; further proposals on Nowen Hill and the Barraboy Pass / Gouladullia area; further turbines on the south side of Nowen Hill; and proposals at Shehy Beg. All of these developments share one feature: they look down on Bantry Bay. If all proceed, somewhere in the region of twenty turbines will completely surround the Mealagh Valley. The cumulative impact assessment for this proposal does not, in my view, properly account for that totality. Our area is being asked to absorb a wholly disproportionate share of onshore wind generation, and the visual, ecological and acoustic consequences of that concentration are not adequately captured by considering each scheme in isolation.

*Mental health.* For the past year, it has felt as though I were waiting for a close relative to die from an incurable disease. It is the last thought on my mind before I go to sleep and the first thought on waking. I can only hope, with every fibre of my being, that this relative will go into remission and live a long and happy life, for their own sake as well as mine. That negative thought process has had a heavy, depressing influence on my life, like a weight I have to carry around and cannot put down. Of course, the "relative" I am speaking of is not a person. But it does have life, and it gives and sustains an unquantifiable amount of life. I am talking about the Maughanaclea Hills and their sibling ridge at Coomclogh, who are to be infected, as I see it, by cancerous growths in the form of fourteen 169-metre turbines proposed by Enerco, of Lissarda, Co. Cork, P14 YN56. Eight turbines are to be placed on the Maughanaclea ridge, overlooking and overhanging the spectacular end of the Mealagh Valley. The remaining six at Coomclogh will be the first thing you see coming over the Cousane Gap going west. I am not alone in being mentally exhausted by the prospect of these developments. The Commission should understand that the protracted uncertainty of this planning process, on top of the prospect of the development itself, is doing real and measurable harm to the wellbeing of people who live here. The peer-reviewed evidence on chronic noise exposure and disturbed sleep around wind farms is now considerable (see source C), and the WHO has issued formal guidance on the health effects of environmental noise including from wind turbines (see source D).

*Noise.* I want to be specific about noise, because the terrain we live in makes the standard noise assessment, in my view, unfit for purpose. The proposed turbines are to be placed on a ridge directly above a deep, narrow, hard-floored valley. Sound from a ridge source travels across a valley in ways that the simple distance-based models used by the developer's consultants do not capture. The peer-reviewed work by Van Renterghem (see source E) shows that ridge-to-valley sound propagation is influenced strongly by terrain shape, ground type, and atmospheric conditions, and that received noise levels at receivers in the valley floor can be markedly higher than free-field models predict, particularly at lower octave bands and under common downwind conditions. The Maughanaclea EIAR's noise chapter does not, as far as I can see, adequately address this. Background noise here is genuinely low, far lower than in the locations where baseline measurements appear to have been taken, and that low background makes any added turbine noise far more intrusive. I am also concerned about amplitude modulation and low-frequency components at night, when the valley sets up its own quiet, and about the 18 to 24 months of rock-breaking that the construction phase will involve, echoing off the valley sides. Every one of those concerns has to be considered before permission is granted.

*Microplastics and the swept area.* One of the less discussed pollutants from wind turbines, besides noise and infrasound, is the steady shedding of microplastic and fibreglass-resin material from leading-edge blade erosion and blade delamination. Blade tips of 169-metre turbines travel at extreme speeds, throwing this material out across a wide and largely undetermined area. Fourteen turbines collectively sweep a very substantial volume of airspace, and that volume is the same airspace through which birds, bats and pollinating insects must move. The published research on Irish upland bird communities, in particular the work of Fernández-Bellón and colleagues (see source F), shows clear displacement effects from wind farms on upland bird densities, with the strongest effects close to turbines and effects on open-habitat species operating at landscape scale. Once you put fourteen turbines on this ridgeline, you are introducing a continuous, kilometres-long obstacle into a corridor that birds, bats and insects currently use freely. That is a serious biodiversity impact and the EIAR does not, in my reading, take it seriously enough.

*Bantry Bay as one landscape.* I ask the Commission to consider all of the valleys with rivers that flow into Bantry Bay as a single landscape, not to be broken up and traded off piece by piece. From Dursey Island all the way to Bantry, and back as far as the Sheep's Head and the Mizen Head, this inland and upland landscape should be devoid of any further industrial wind generating apparatus, because such structures totally take from the natural beauty of the bay. On the north side of Bantry Bay, starting at the Healy Pass, then to the Caha Pass, the Priest's Leap, the top of Borlin Valley, the Pass of Keimaneigh, Gortluachra, the Cousane Gap, the Barraboy at the end of the Mealagh Valley, on to Barnafola which adjoins Derreenacrinnig, to Glandart south of Mullaghreisk, and to Vaughan's Pass looking north to Bantry, there should be no wind turbines on, inside, or on top of this circle of high ground that overlooks Bantry Bay. The County Development Plan identifies the area as a High Value Landscape and recognises that further extensive upland development in this part of West Cork would be inappropriate. Once the line is crossed on a ridge like Maughanaclea, the principle is conceded for the whole bowl. I respectfully beg the Commission not to let that happen.

*Developer's history and the wider energy picture.* I have followed wind energy in Ireland for long enough to know that the commercial pattern is consistent. Companies build out a development pipeline at considerable subsidy cost to the Irish electricity consumer, and the underlying assets, once consented, are routinely flipped to overseas investors. The profits leave the country. The community that hosts the turbines is left with the noise, the lights, the loss of view, and the loss of property value. Meanwhile, electricity demand in Ireland is rising faster than renewable generation can keep up with, in significant part because of data-centre growth. The peer-reviewed work of Prof Hannah Daly at University College Cork (see source G) documents that data centres in Ireland consumed in the order of 21 per cent of metered electricity in 2023, and that growth in renewables in recent years has been more than matched by growth in data-centre demand, meaning that new wind capacity is not actually displacing fossil generation at the rate the public has been led to believe. Whatever the merits of climate action in principle, and I am not against climate action, the destruction of a place like the Mealagh Valley cannot be justified by an industrial-scale electricity bill from server halls in Dublin. The wrong site, for the wrong reason, paid for by the wrong people.

*The landscape and recovery.* Once a ridgeline like Maughanaclea is scarred by access tracks, hardstands, turbine foundations, transformers, substation buildings, grid lines and borrow pits, it does not return to what it was. The peat is opened, the hydrology altered, and the visual integrity of the skyline is gone for the operational life of the development and beyond. The Irish experience with peat-slope construction at Derrybrien remains a cautionary lesson, and the peer-reviewed analysis of peat instability and large-scale peat slides following turbine construction on blanket bog (see source H)

makes the point that these landscapes do not forgive heavy infrastructure. The site at Maughanaclea is on peat-dominated, steep, exposed ground. The risk of fire, of peat slide, and of long-term hydrological damage to the streams that feed the Mealagh and Owvane rivers is real, and the EIAR's reassurances on these points do not in my view withstand scrutiny.

*Property values.* I would not normally raise property values, because to my mind the deeper loss is the place itself, but it is a relevant material consideration in planning. The hedonic-pricing analysis of Gillespie and McHale (see source I), which studied house prices along the western Irish seaboard, found a measurable reduction in property values within one kilometre of operational wind farms and a residual effect persisting beyond that distance. For a household whose income depends, as ours does, on the sale of holiday accommodation, the loss of view and amenity translates directly into nightly-rate erosion and a fall in the underlying value of the property. That is a private financial cost imposed on us by a private commercial development, with no realistic prospect of compensation.

*Fairness in the planning process.* I want to say something about the procedure itself. By lumping Maughanaclea and Coomclogh together and treating them as Strategic Infrastructure, Enerco have, in my view, leapfrogged the ordinary planning process, where the public has only one shot at stopping a development of this scale. Enerco have had more than two years to prepare thousands of pages of application material with their professional consultants, including the consultancy MKO. Members of this community have had four weeks to deconstruct that material and write objections, while continuing to run businesses, mind children, and look after older relatives. I know I am not the most articulate of objectors. I know there are people who have given the last month of their family lives to this process, to the detriment of their own health. Where is the fairness in this? Everything is tipped in favour of the developer. I know the members of An Coimisiún Pleanála perform their function under statute and within tight statutory timeframes. I would only plead with you: please do something good for the ordinary people of this valley. Please.

*Conclusion.* For all of the reasons set out above, and on the grounds of landscape impact, cumulative impact, residential and tourism amenity, dark-sky degradation, noise, biodiversity, peat stability, mental wellbeing, property value, and the imbalance of the planning process itself, I respectfully ask the Commission to refuse permission for the proposed Maughanaclea Wind Farm.

Yours sincerely,

Noel Burke
Maulikeeve, Bantry, Co. Cork, P75 EV12
20 May 2026

**Sources cited**

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**B.** Fáilte Ireland (2019). *Feasibility Study for Maximising the Tourism Potential of Dark Sky Assets.* Dublin: Fáilte Ireland.

**C.** Schmidt, J.H. & Klokker, M. (2014). *Health effects related to wind turbine noise exposure: a systematic review.* PLoS ONE, 9(12), e114183.

**D.** World Health Organization (2018). *Environmental Noise Guidelines for the European Region.* Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe.

**E.** Van Renterghem, T. (2017). *Sound propagation from a ridge wind turbine across a valley.* Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A, 375, 20160105.

**F.** Fernández-Bellón, D., Wilson, M.W., Irwin, S. & O'Halloran, J. (2019). *Effects of development of wind energy and associated changes in land use on bird densities in upland areas.* Conservation Biology, 33(2), 413–422.

**G.** Daly, H. (2024). *Data Centres and the Carbon Budgets.* MaREI Centre / Environmental Research Institute, University College Cork.

**H.** Lindsay, R. & Bragg, O. (2004). *Wind Farms and Blanket Peat: The Bog Slide of 16 October 2003 at Derrybrien, Co. Galway, Ireland.* University of East London report.

**I.** Gillespie, T. & McHale, P. (2023). *Wind Turbines and House Prices Along the West of Ireland: A Hedonic Pricing Approach.* CERIS Working Paper 2023/01, University of Galway.

## Appendix: photographs

The following photographs are submitted in support of this objection. They show the receiving landscape from our property at Maulikeeve and the character of the home referred to in the body of the submission.

*Photograph 1. View northeast from Maulikeeve toward the Maughanaclea and Coomclogh ridgeline, in the direction of the proposed turbine bank. The upland horizon shown here would be occupied by fourteen turbines, each 169 metres to blade tip, were the application to be granted. May 2026.*

*Photograph 2. The house at Maulikeeve. Self-designed and built with stone from the surrounding hillside, wood from recycled timber frame panels, and beams and posts from locally sourced trees. The curved green roof is designed to emulate the rolls and curves of the surrounding landscape. May 2026.*