

Submission to An Coimisiún Pleanála

Re: Planning Reference 324387 – Proposed Muingmore Wind Farm

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to make a formal submission objecting to the proposed Muingmore Wind Farm development.

I am a resident of Doolough, County Mayo (F26 H5P7), one of the communities directly affected by this proposal. I have lived in Erris for most of my life and have a deep appreciation of the area's landscape, environment and economy.

I wish to state at the outset that I support Ireland's transition to renewable energy and recognise the importance of meeting our national climate and energy security objectives. My objection is not to renewable energy itself, but to the location, scale and cumulative impact of this particular proposal within the wider context of North Mayo.

In my opinion, the applicant has failed to demonstrate that this development can be accommodated without causing unacceptable impacts on the landscape, tourism economy, biodiversity, community wellbeing and long-term sustainable development of Erris.

1. Cumulative Concentration of Energy Infrastructure in North Mayo

The most significant issue arising from this application is that it cannot be considered in isolation.

The proposed Muingmore Wind Farm forms part of an increasingly extensive concentration of existing, permitted and proposed strategic energy infrastructure within a relatively small area of North Mayo.

This includes:

- Oweninny Wind Farm;
- Sheskin Wind Farm;
- The existing wind turbines at Bunahowen, located only 4 kilometres from the proposed development;
- Bellanaboy Gas Terminal;
- The existing Bangor Erris Kitepower project;
- Existing high-voltage transmission infrastructure;
- Existing and proposed substations and switching stations;
- Proposed Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS);
- Proposed hydrogen production facilities;
- Proposed bioenergy developments;
- Associated electricity grid infrastructure.

While each development may be capable of assessment on its own merits, the Board is also required to consider their cumulative environmental, social and economic impacts.

North Mayo has already made a significant contribution to Ireland's energy infrastructure. The question before the Board is therefore not whether another renewable energy project should proceed in principle, but whether the cumulative concentration of industrial-scale energy infrastructure within this region is now fundamentally changing the character and future development of the area.

The cumulative effects extend beyond visual impact. They influence landscape character, tourism, biodiversity, residential amenity and the perception of Erris as one of Ireland's most distinctive natural landscapes.

2. Landscape Character

Erris is recognised for its expansive blanket bogs, Atlantic coastline, mountain scenery, rivers and open landscapes.

These landscapes are increasingly rare in Ireland and represent one of the area's greatest environmental and economic assets.

The proposed turbines, reaching up to 180 metres in height, together with associated infrastructure, would introduce industrial-scale structures into this landscape that would be visible across a considerable area.

When viewed alongside existing and proposed energy developments, the proposal contributes to a progressive transformation of the landscape from one defined primarily by its natural qualities to one increasingly characterised by major energy infrastructure.

I believe the Board should carefully consider whether this cumulative change remains compatible with the long-term protection of the landscape character of Erris.

3. Tourism and the Local Economy

Tourism is one of the few sustainable industries available within Erris.

Unlike many other parts of Ireland, tourism in this region is directly dependent upon the quality of the natural environment.

Visitors are attracted by:

- The Wild Atlantic Way;
- Atlantic coastal scenery;
- Walking and hiking;
- Cycling;
- Sea angling;
- Wildlife;

- Birdwatching;
- Kite surfing;
- Kayaking;
- Dark skies;
- The sense of remoteness and tranquillity that characterises the region.

The local economy contains numerous businesses whose success depends upon preserving these qualities.

Within the immediate area alone there are established accommodation providers including the Erris Coast Hotel and the Sea Rod Inn, together with businesses providing guided outdoor activities including kayaking, kite surfing and other marine recreation.

These businesses depend upon the continued attractiveness of Erris as an outstanding natural destination.

The applicant has not, in my opinion, adequately demonstrated that the cumulative industrialisation of the surrounding landscape will not have long-term implications for the tourism economy upon which many local livelihoods depend.

4. Wild Atlantic Way

The Wild Atlantic Way represents one of Ireland's most successful tourism initiatives.

The attraction of this route depends upon preserving landscape quality, scenic views and the unique character of the western seaboard.

The section through Erris is promoted because of its open landscapes, coastal scenery and relatively undeveloped character.

The Board should carefully consider whether the continued concentration of industrial-scale energy infrastructure is compatible with maintaining the qualities that the State itself actively promotes as part of the Wild Atlantic Way experience.

5. Wild Nephin National Park and the Wider Landscape

The proposed development lies within the wider landscape associated with Wild Nephin National Park.

Although the turbines may not be located within the National Park itself, visitors experience the wider Erris landscape as part of their journey to and from the Park.

The sense of wilderness, remoteness and naturalness associated with Wild Nephin extends beyond the Park boundary.

I believe the Board should give careful consideration to the cumulative impact of major industrial infrastructure on this wider landscape setting and it's impact on the park's renowned dark skies.

6. Biodiversity

North Mayo contains habitats and species of national and international importance.

The region includes Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation and extensive blanket bog habitats supporting protected bird species and other wildlife.

Given the concentration of existing and proposed developments within the wider area, cumulative ecological impacts deserve particularly careful consideration.

The precautionary principle should apply wherever uncertainty exists regarding impacts on protected habitats or species.

7. Peatland and Hydrology

The development is proposed within a peatland landscape that performs important ecological and carbon storage functions.

Construction of turbines, roads and associated infrastructure has the potential to alter hydrology, disturb peat and release stored carbon.

The Board should be fully satisfied that these impacts have been comprehensively assessed and can be effectively mitigated over the lifetime of the project.

8. Traffic and Community Infrastructure

The construction phase will generate significant movements of heavy goods vehicles along rural roads that were not designed for sustained industrial traffic.

This has the potential to affect:

- Emergency ambulance access;
- Fire and rescue services;
- School transport services;
- Public bus services;
- Agricultural traffic;
- Local businesses;
- Residents travelling to work, healthcare appointments and other essential services.

Road closures, traffic management measures and the movement of abnormal loads should be assessed not only in engineering terms but also in terms of their effects on the daily functioning of local communities.

9. Community Consultation

I am concerned that the applicant's consultation process did not reflect the true geographic extent of the development's likely impacts.

My understanding is that direct consultation during 2023 focused primarily on residents living within approximately one kilometre of the proposed turbines.

However, the impacts of a development of this scale extend considerably further.

Residents, tourism businesses, community organisations and recreational users throughout Doolough, Doohoma, Geesala, Bangor Erris, Blacksod and the wider Erris Peninsula all have legitimate interests in the future character and economic development of the area.

I do not believe that the consultation process adequately reflected the wider community that stands to be affected by the proposal.

Conclusion

North Mayo has consistently played an important role in supporting Ireland's energy infrastructure.

However, planning decisions must also ensure that renewable energy development is balanced with the protection of landscape, biodiversity, tourism and sustainable rural communities.

The principal issue before the Board is not simply whether another wind farm can be accommodated in North Mayo. It is whether the cumulative concentration of existing, permitted and proposed industrial-scale energy infrastructure has now reached a point where it risks fundamentally altering one of Ireland's most environmentally significant and tourism-dependent regions.

For the reasons outlined above, I respectfully request that An Coimisiún Pleanála refuse planning permission for the proposed Muingmore Wind Farm.

Yours faithfully,

Ciarán O'Hara

Doolough, Geesala, Ballina, County Mayo, F26 H5P7