

Occupational Therapy Observational Report
Supporting Objection to Proposed Muingmore Wind Farm Development
Co. Mayo

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Date: 01.06.2026

1. Introduction

This Occupational Therapy Observational Report has been prepared in support of an objection to the proposed Muingmore Wind Farm (Case number 324387) development, comprising 13 industrial-scale wind turbines and associated infrastructure within a highly sensitive rural coastal environment in County Mayo.

The purpose of this report is to consider the likely occupational, sensory, psychological, social and functional impacts of the proposed development on residents living within Muingmore and the wider Erris area. This report gives particular consideration to children and young families, remote workers, farmers, older adults, socially isolated residents, neurodivergent individuals, tourism-dependent occupations and the wider long-term sustainability of rural community life.

This report adopts an occupational therapy and public health perspective. Occupational therapy recognises that health and wellbeing are shaped not only by medical or physical factors, but also by the relationship between people, their environment, and their ability to meaningfully participate in everyday life. In a rural setting such as North Mayo, this relationship is especially significant.

2. Sensory Environment, Tranquillity and Residential Amenity

The proposed development introduces multiple sensory changes including turbine movement, shadow flicker, mechanical and low-frequency noise, aviation lighting, construction disturbance and industrial visual movement across an otherwise open and natural landscape.

From an occupational therapy perspective, these environmental changes will reduce emotional regulation, concentration, sleep quality and overall sensory comfort. On beaches within the 2 km range of the proposed site, groups and activities such as mindfulness walks, group meditations, yoga sessions, physical activity classes and sound baths have all been active in recent months.

A notable concern arises when reading the application documents together.

The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment identifies the receiving environment as scenic, tranquil, highly sensitive and strongly associated with naturalness, remoteness and place. These qualities are described throughout the application as defining characteristics of the area.

At the same time, the Noise and Vibration Assessment concludes that turbine noise will generally be masked by background conditions and is unlikely to create significant effects. These two positions clearly contradict each other.

The very features relied upon elsewhere in the application to describe the area — tranquillity, openness and environmental sensitivity. This will increase awareness of industrial turbine sound, repetitive blade movement and environmental change, even where technical thresholds are met.

For residents living and functioning in this environment every day, sensory experience cannot be reduced to compliance figures alone. Chapter 17 confirms that operational noise acceptability is dependent on final turbine selection and, where required, the use of noise-reduced operating modes. **The EIAR acknowledges that for two candidate turbine models, potentially significant operational noise effects would arise unless mitigation is applied. This means residential comfort remains dependent on future turbine manufacturer confirmation and future operational restrictions rather than being fully resolved at application stage.** This is unacceptable and should be taken into consideration.

The EIAR also records Mayo County Council's concern that separation distances alone cannot reliably control wind farm noise. However, elsewhere in the assessment, separation distance is repeatedly relied upon as a principal reason for scoping out vibration and low-frequency assessment. This inconsistency creates uncertainty and concern regarding the adequacy of the residential amenity assessment and whether the lived sensory experience of nearby residents has been fully evaluated.

The volume and complexity of mitigation measures proposed throughout the EIAR further indicate that the receiving environment is highly sensitive and that the development is not inherently compatible with the site without layered mitigation, monitoring and post-consent controls. From an occupational and public health perspective, reliance on future controls introduces uncertainty and reduces confidence that acceptable residential comfort standards can be consistently maintained over time.

The constant visibility and movement of large turbines within this currently unspoilt coastal landscape will alter how people experience their home environment, replacing a sense of tranquillity with an ongoing awareness of industrial infrastructure and activity. This will be particularly difficult for children, autistic and neurodivergent residents, people experiencing anxiety, older adults, migraine sufferers, remote workers and socially isolated residents spending prolonged time at home. **There is concern and uncertainty because elements of mitigation are not fully fixed at application stage and rely on future operational controls.**

Taken together, the application appears to understate the lived sensory and occupational impact of industrial-scale turbines within a highly sensitive rural setting.

3. Rural Occupational Wellbeing, Identity and Community Sustainability

The Muingmore and wider Erris area is a distinctive rural coastal landscape characterised by natural ruggedness, scenic openness, tranquillity, ecological sensitivity, Atlantic exposure and a strong sense of place.

This landscape is far more than a visual backdrop. It forms an important part of daily life, emotional wellbeing and community identity. For many residents, it supports work, family life, farming, outdoor activity, rest, social participation and mental restoration.

Within rural North Mayo, homes frequently function as workplaces, caregiving environments, educational settings and centres of family and community life. Farming and tourism remain central to the local economy. Outdoor occupations and a strong connection with the surrounding environment contribute directly to wellbeing and quality of life.

In recent years, the area has also benefited from families and professionals returning home to settle for specifically what the areas offers them. These residents have contributed to local school enrolment, strengthened community sustainability and brought valuable clinical expertise, trade skills, educational experience and broader wellbeing services into a geographically isolated area.

The surrounding environment currently provides a level of calm, predictability and restoration that supports both everyday occupational functioning and community resilience.

The proposed wind farm will negatively alter the environment by eliminating the qualities that currently sustain both wellbeing and long-term rural sustainability.

4. Tourism, Landscape and the Rural Economy

The relationship between the surrounding landscape and the local economy is significant.

Tourism in Erris depends heavily on scenic quality, rugged coastal character, peace, outdoor activity and the experience of an unspoilt natural environment. Accommodation providers, tourism businesses, recreation providers and residents all rely on this wider landscape.

Erris has already been independently recognised at national level for its wild, undeveloped and unspoilt character. In 2014, Erris was awarded the Irish Times "Best Place to Go Wild in Ireland" title, with judges specifically citing its wilderness, biodiversity, scenic beauty and relative absence of development. The qualities for which the area received national tourism recognition are the same qualities that would be fundamentally altered by the introduction of industrial-scale turbines approximately 180 metres in height. The proposal therefore risks undermining a nationally recognised tourism asset and the environmental characteristics upon which the area's tourism economy depends.

A particularly important concern arises in relation to Mayo County Council's request for further assessment.

The Council specifically requested assessment of sensitive tourism receptors and scenic and coastal areas, and requested that the study area be extended to 30 km.

The applicant subsequently stated that a 20 km study area was sufficient and that it was not considered necessary to extend the assessment.

From an occupational therapy and community wellbeing perspective, this is a significant concern. The Erris landscape functions as a connected environmental and economic system extending well beyond 20 km. Residents, tourism businesses and visitors experience and rely upon the wider scenic and coastal landscape as part of a continuous place-based environment.

By not carrying out the requested 30 km assessment, the application underrepresents the wider visual, occupational and economic relationship between the landscape and tourism-dependent livelihoods.

This creates grave uncertainty as to whether the full impact on tourism participation, visitor experience, economic sustainability and community wellbeing has been properly assessed.

The EIAR's own Landscape and Visual Assessment records multiple viewpoints within the local area (including Doolough and Geesala) as experiencing **substantial-moderate, negative and long-term visual effects**, yet the application classifies these as "**not significant.**" Given the importance of tourism to the local economy, this omission warrants careful consideration.

The proposed landscape mitigation also does not avoid the long-term visual impact of turbines reaching approximately 180 metres in height. The mitigation proposed is largely based on reinstatement following the operational life of the project. For residents, children and returning families, a 35-year operational period represents a generational alteration of rural landscape character rather than a temporary change, with serious implications for place attachment, identity and long-term confidence in the area as a place to live and invest.

5. Rural Regeneration and the Return of Young Families

A particularly significant concern is the negative impact this development will have on rural regeneration and future settlement.

North Mayo has worked hard to retain and attract younger families and returning residents. Many have deliberately chosen to return in order to raise children in a healthy environment, work remotely, support family members and contribute positively to the community. For example, **4 out of 7 children enrolled in a local national school this year (2026) are from families who have returned home after working abroad within the last three years to access a more calm, tranquil, safe family friendly environment.** This poses a major concern for future generations.

The natural environment and sense of place are central to that decision.

Where large-scale industrial development changes the character of an area so substantially, there is a real concern that future families will be discouraged from returning or settling locally. This risks weakening long-term community sustainability and reducing opportunities for future growth.

In a rural area, this in turn will also affect school viability, community organisations, local enterprise and the continued sharing of skills and learning within the wider population.

The return of younger families and professionals brings new knowledge, employment opportunities, educational input and practical services that strengthen rural life. The loss of confidence in the area as a place to build, settle and invest would therefore extend beyond individual households and affect the broader social and economic future of the community.

6. Occupational Functioning and Remote Working

Remote and flexible working now play an increasingly important role in rural Ireland.

For many residents, the home environment supports employment, online learning, digital enterprise, telehealth access and community engagement throughout the working day.

The proposed development will interfere with this through constant visual awareness of turbines, repeated movement, distraction, reduced concentration, cognitive fatigue and increased environmental stress.

Unlike occasional visitors or transient road users, people working from home experience their environment for prolonged periods every day.

The quality and usability of the home environment is therefore directly connected to occupational performance, productivity and mental wellbeing.

Has the applicant identified all existing wireless broadband and telecare links serving local communities, and has the assessment been independently verified? This should be considered a significant planning and sustainability issue.

7. Mental and Emotional Wellbeing

The surrounding landscape currently provides important therapeutic and restorative value.

Residents rely on it for calm, connection to nature, physical activity, emotional grounding and relief from daily stress.

The industrialisation of this environment has proven to contribute to chronic stress, reduced enjoyment of home (where people should feel safe), emotional fatigue, sleep disturbance and environmental grief associated with the loss of place and identity.

Technical compliance with planning thresholds does not in any way fully address the emotional and psychological reality of long-term daily exposure.

This cumulative effect should be given serious consideration.

8. Children, Family Life and Vulnerable Residents

Children and families benefit from stable, restorative environments.

Environmental stress and change have been proven to affect sleep, emotional regulation, outdoor play, family routines and overall household wellbeing.

The impact is heightened for residents who are already vulnerable, including older adults, socially isolated individuals and people living with sensory or cognitive difficulties.

Occupational therapy recognises the importance of supportive and predictable environments in enabling independence, participation and wellbeing.

These considerations are particularly relevant in a dispersed rural setting where alternative supports are limited.

9. Farming, Wildlife and Relationship with Place

The surrounding landscape supports farming, peatland systems, wildlife habitats, birdlife and biodiversity. For residents, this connection with land and wildlife forms part of daily occupation, recreation and local identity. Any perceived degradation of these natural systems may affect wellbeing, environmental stewardship and attachment to place.

This is particularly relevant in an area where landscape and ecology are so closely tied to identity and livelihood.

10. Community Participation and Social Cohesion

Large-scale developments within small rural communities can generate long-term stress and tension. This may affect community participation, relationships, trust and sense of belonging.

In isolated rural settings, these impacts can be felt deeply and over long periods.

The emotional burden of unresolved environmental conflict should be recognised as a significant community wellbeing concern within a rural community where a lot of groups/societies rely on community volunteering and working together - this poses a future concern for all ages.

11. Conclusion

Occupational therapy adopts a person–environment–occupation (PEO Model) perspective. While the EIAR assesses individual environmental factors separately, residents experience these changes cumulatively as part of everyday life. The interaction between visual change, noise, aviation lighting, construction activity, uncertainty and altered landscape character has the potential to affect occupational participation in ways that are not fully captured by topic-specific technical assessments. Based on occupational therapy principles relating to environmental health, occupational participation, sensory regulation, mental wellbeing, community sustainability and public health, it is considered that the proposed Muingmore Wind Farm development has the ability to create substantial adverse impacts on residents and the wider rural community.

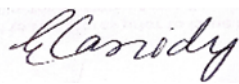
Particular concern exists regarding occupational wellbeing, sensory burden, mental and emotional health, children and vulnerable residents, tourism and farming sustainability, community participation, environmental identity and the long-term viability of rural regeneration.

Of particular concern is the inconsistency between elements of the application, including the contrast between the acknowledged sensitivity and tranquillity of the receiving landscape and the conclusion of limited noise impact, together with the applicant's decision not to complete the 30 km tourism and landscape assessment specifically requested by Mayo County Council.

These issues create uncertainty and many questions as to whether the wider occupational, environmental and community wellbeing impacts have been fully assessed.

The proposed development risks undermining the qualities that currently sustain rural life, wellbeing, resilience and future sustainability in North Mayo.

I respectfully request that An Bord Pleanála give substantial weight to the occupational, environmental and community wellbeing impacts outlined above when determining this application.

Signed: 

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