

A Bridge too Far

Press Release of the Gweebarra Conservation Group, Donegal, Ireland

The Gweebarra River and Bay, like many places in Donegal, is an area of immense natural beauty. There are many protected species, including large deer, seal and salmon populations as well as Golden Eagles, Grouse and Corncrakes and various protected flowers, butterflies, bats and mosses.

The people around here love the land and they love the scenery. It's a hard landscape with harsh weather but we love the peace and quiet, being close to nature and the beauty of it all.

However the Gweebarra region is now under threat from mining, power and wind companies who want to invade our peace and quiet, endanger our health and destroy the land our ancestors sweated blood and tears on just so they can get make profits at our expense.

These developers have destroyed our economy and now they want to destroy Donegal for profit before, no doubt, moving onto destroying our seas trying to extract oil and gas.

And just as they ignored our opinion on bailing out the Banks the State is intent on ignoring our objections and letting these developers destroy Donegal with industrial wind farms and the high voltage power lines needed to maintain the grid. The State is even giving these companies tax breaks to do so.

Local people have been campaigning against the high voltage power line being erected cross country for over a decade but, in November, 2009, the Directors of An Bord Pleanála (the Irish Planning Board) overruled their own Inspector and granted planning permission to ESB and Eirgrid to erect the power line across 102kms of County Donegal, most of which is in the Gaeltacht (Gaelic speaking area).

This power line is not to bring power into Donegal but to take it out from the many planned wind farms in the county. Since planning permission was granted for the power line 50 new wind energy companies have indicated they are applying for Planning Permission in this region.

Some of the biggest and contentious wind farm applications to date in Donegal are around the Glenties area in south west Donegal. There is an application for a large wind farm at Graffy where 19 turbines are proposed, 16 of them within 500m of people's homes, several at less than 200m.

In addition Straboy Wind Energy Ltd has applied to build a substation and 38 wind turbines, 100 metres high (from ground to blade tip) a few kilometres north of Glenties which will badly impact on the whole Region. Locals have only 5 weeks to object.

If Planning Permission is granted to Straboy Wind Energy Ltd it would mean 10,000 metres (1,700 lorry loads) of concrete being poured into excavated bog land on the top of Derkbeg mountain with the potential to pollute the Gweebarra and Stranacashel Rivers, the Gweebarra Bay, numerous local lakes and household wells. Many people here are not on mains water but rely on individual water wells.

The CO₂ released into the atmosphere when peat is excavated to erect the wind turbines, together with the pollution generated in the manufacture of the 240 metres of concrete needed to stabilise EACH turbine, means that these wind farms create more CO₂ when they are built than they will ever offset.

Donegal already produces more wind energy than any other county in Ireland at 264MW but the State wants to increase wind production in Donegal to 690MW plus, representing a land grab of over 3,000 hectares, which will mean that virtually every hill top in Donegal will be covered in wind turbines and the pylons and power lines needed to maintain them will degrade all the areas in between.

Why should the poor Gaelic speaking people in Donegal be burdened with producing half the onshore wind energy production in Ireland by 2020?

This is an environmental injustice which is illegal under International Law.

In March, 2010 so called 'Green' Minister Eamon Ryan granted a prospecting license for 50 townlands around the Gweebarra, including the River bed and in the Bay. (Townlands are divisions of land, anything from an acre to many thousands of acres in rural Ireland).

If metals are found, cyanide could be used to extract the metals which would pollute the river, lakes and household wells. But we suspect that the real reason the prospectors have been given the license is so that they can survey the Gweebarra or Trawenna Bays as potential locations for hydro-electric dams to maintain the grid when there is no wind or the winds are too high to safely run the turbines, which is often in Donegal. It would mean forcing people to move to avoid the cancers and depression they would get living in proximity to the wind farms and the power lines. Such a scheme has already been proposed in Kilcar further south in County Donegal where people will be forced out of their homes to flood a valley.

We cannot allow this to happen. We have had enough of being ignored and neglected by the State. We do not even have full representation as there has been a vacant Dail Deputy seat for over a year and the Government refuses to hold a by-election in south west Donegal.

Donegal gained nothing from the Celtic Tiger but 20,000 empty houses. Are the developers now going to be allowed to destroy our hills with wind turbines and power lines to benefit nothing but the developers' bank accounts?

We are holding the 'Gather at the Gweebarra!' on the Gweebarra Bridge from 11.00am to 2.00pm this coming Saturday, July 10th, to show our opposition to these threats to our right to a peaceful life in our own homes now and into the future.

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