

Wind power must be backed up with additional power - environmentalist

There is "no doubt" the site of a proposed wind farm outside of Glenties, considered a very important landscape, "will no longer be of national importance once a wind farm is installed", a Donegal environmentalist told this week's An Bord Pleanála oral hearing.

Retired ecologist Ralph Sheppard, a witness for the Glenties Wind Farm Information Group, objectors to the development, said 12 Natura 2000 sites have been identified within 10 kilometres, what Mr. Sheppard called "an extraordinarily high number of sites for such a small area". Natura 2000 is an EU-wide network of nature protection established under the 1992 Habitats Directive.

He said the designations select the most important examples of each habitat type under threat in Europe as a whole, so it can be assumed that where the areas of special protection are high, there are other sites falling just below the standard that by any other reckoning would also be good examples.

"This is certainly the case with Straboy," he said. Mr. Sheppard also said fragmenting the site into numerous small boglets through the development, "is a recipe for a series of local extinctions heading ultimately to complete extinction on the site".

Mr. Sheppard noted that the project's Natural Impact Statement said when water quality mitigation is fully implemented, significant impacts on the integrity of the west of Ardara/Maas Road Special Area of Conservation will be highly unlikely. However, he said there was what he called is a pattern in Donegal County Council planning permissions whereby controversial applications are granted planning permission with a string of conditions.

"But there is no capacity in Donegal for monitoring planning applications, or ensuring that conditions are



Ralph Sheppard

adhered to," he said. "Often the conditions are so stringent that it is hard to see how they could be implemented."

"But that doesn't seem to matter," Mr. Sheppard said. "Once granted, it is taken on trust that the developers will fully comply, but in my experience, they seldom do. There is no reason to suppose that they will in this case."

In his concluding comments, Mr. Sheppard asked, "Where is the logic in putting such effort into evaluating

ing a site to be of national importance for conservation, and then deciding to proceed with a proposal that will destroy it?"

The environmentalist said renewable energy is not just desirable but absolutely essential. But he said it was also necessary to reduce total energy demand and the impact on the planet of more industrial activity and economic growth.

"We won't do that with wind power," he said, adding that wind power must be backed up with additional power that comes into play when the wind is not blowing.

"And that usually means electricity generated by fossil fuels," he said. "But you can't leave a new power station idle and just switch it on when the wind drops. It has to run all the time."

In terms of siting turbines, Mr. Sheppard said, "There are far more potential turbine sites on the flat midland plain than on the relatively few acceptable hillslops."

Another witness for the information group, Dr. Olivia Bragg, a research fellow attached to the geography department of the University of Dundee in Scotland, addressed the project's Environmental Impact Statement's peat stability assessment, saying, "I have never before seen such a minimal approach presented in support of a wind farm planning application."

In her comments, Dr. Bragg said only peat thickness and slope were considered in defining the hazard zone, while other methodologies recognize the importance of at least eight factors. She also said some well-known risk factors were not recorded during the field survey, while others were noted but not taken into account in assessing peat stability.

Dr. Bragg said the protected freshwater pearl mussel in the Owenea River, three kilometres downstream of

Straboy, are notably sensitive receptors for displaced peat that would reach the Stracashel River. She said that because the site drains into this river, this would be the most likely route for any displaced peat that cannot be contained.

"Thus it would seem prudent to take an especially precautionary approach to any risk of peat-slide identified for the Straboy proposal," she said.

In a 13-page submission, Dr. Bragg said that while the developer acknowledged "the international scale of impact of any peat failure at this site", many details that are important in determining whether the development is viable, "appear to have been left for investigation and/or decision after planning permission is obtained".

She said the information presented, "indicates that there is a very low margin of safety in terms of the peat slide risk associated with the proposed development, such that the potential for eliminating it through mitigation is limited and uncertain".

Gavin Lawlor, director of Tom Phillips and Associates, representing Straboy Wind Energy, said he would raise some of Dr. Bragg's concerns with a witness who was scheduled to speak on Wednesday.

In a separate submission Dr. Fiona Hardy, a resident of Glenties, took issue with a response to her appeal to the project that referred to a stream known locally as Sruthan na nFhogai as an ephemeral drainage ditch. Rather, she said, it was a tributary of the Stracashel River, which enters the Owenea River. It is also the source of the household water supply for two houses in the area, she said.

Dr. Hardy, recently retired from the Health Service Executive, also said that nine of the proposed turbines stand between 10 and 156 metres from local waterways or lakes.

Local residents speak out against wind farm

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BY CAROLYN FARRAR

The daughter of one of the landowners who has agreed to lease lands to a proposed wind farm outside Glenties

