

Hearing concludes

Closing statements present different views of wind farm impact

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News Reporter

IN closing statements at the An Bord Pleanála oral hearing on a proposed wind farm outside of Glenties, representatives of the developers and of objectors to the development presented very different views of the impact of the project on the local environment and on people's health.

Speaking at the end of six days of submissions, the closing statements illustrated how far apart the parties remain.

Gavin Lawlor, director of Tom Phillips and Associates, representing the developers, said the wind farm "is within the best interests of proper planning and sustainable development, not only for the country's energy security, but also for the Glenties area."

John Evans, representing the Glenties Wind Farm Information Group, said, "An Bord is obliged to balance the conflicting objectives that are apparent in this application at Straboy. We submit that the balance comes down against this proposal and on the side of the town of Glenties, its environs, its people."

The oral hearing was called after 15 appeals were lodged against Donegal County Council's decision in January to grant planning permission for 22 of the 25 turbines in the Straboy Wind Energy Ltd. application. The wind farm would sit 1.5 kilometres north east of Glenties.

In his statement, Mr. Lawlor

cited submissions from experts the developers had presented at the hearing in town planning, environmental and health issues, noise and vibrations, archaeology and geology and hydrogeology. He said submissions for the developers indicated that the wind farm would have no impact on protected views, and said there were no occupied dwellings within 500 metres of any turbine. In rejecting suggested health impacts he said the applicant had submitted 17 scientific studies rebutting the phenomenon known as "Wind Farm Syndrome".

Mr. Lawlor also defended the applicants' assessment of the project's impact on the environment and bird life. However, he said applicants would accept a condition to any consent that a further confirmatory breeding bird survey would be carried out from April to June, before development began. He said if the survey identified any of a number of protected species to be nesting, such as Golden Eagle or peregrine, construction would not be undertaken from April to June of any year.

Mr. Evans, in his closing statement, raised the issue of the 2003 landslide at Derrybrien, County Galway, which dislodged 450,000 cubic metres of peat over a 32-kilometre stretch. The peatslide polluted a river and killed 50,000 fish. In 2008, the European Court of Justice found a proper environmental impact assessment had not been carried out for the Derrybrien wind farm project.

During the hearing, experts



A picture from the first day at the hearing in Glenties.

called by objectors criticised the methodology and conclusions of the Environmental Impact Statement for the Straboy project.

"It is our view that the inadequacy of the Environmental Impact Statement of 2011 prepared by the developers of the Straboy project has been comprehensively demonstrated by expert testimony," Mr. Evans said.

He also said objectors employed a broad base of information: "Human values, environmental sciences, love of this beautiful location, mathematics, appreciation of culture, engineering, love of family -- all have been at work to make our case to the inspector and to An Bord," he said.

Health risks not always immediately apparent, objectors tell oral hearing

SEVERAL objectors to the proposed wind farm at Straboy presented closing statements to the An Bord Pleanála oral hearing on Thursday, citing concerns about the impact of the development on people's health and on the environment.

Liam Miller, whose home is 700 metres from the nearest turbine in the proposed development, said in his closing statement that history has shown that health risks are not always immediately apparent.

"Historically we've had lead, asbestos, smoking, uranium, mercury, all of which over time have been shown with a build-up to show injuries and dangers to people's health," he said. "So that's the one thing I would ask the inspector to keep in mind when he has to make this decision. Just because you can't see what makes people sick doesn't mean it's not the wind farms that

are making them ill."

Mr. Miller, in his submission to the oral hearing earlier on Thursday, said, "You're taking one of the places left in the country where there is peace and tranquillity, panoramas and vistas, and you're going to take that away forever, so I wouldn't do that lightly, either." He also questioned why developers had not measured the noise levels on his lands, citing their proximity to the turbines.

Patricia Sharkey, in a closing statement for the Gweebarra Conservation group, said, "In opposing this wind farm our opinion is this local Gaeltacht will be wiped out if it goes ahead," adding that, "cultural heritage is under threat from industrialisation of this area".

Ms. Sharkey delivered a lengthy statement to the hearing on Tuesday in which she said the conservation group in 2008 and 2009 also objected to the Eirgrid/

ESB 110kv power line through Donegal, "because we knew then that this power line was not to improve the electricity infrastructure of the county, but was to facilitate the planned desecration of the county with industrial wind plants, and we were proved right in our assertion".

"I was very moved by all the speeches of local people here over the last two weeks and happy the record will show future archivists the people of this area did not support this project and were vehemently opposed to it," Ms. Sharkey said.

Joan Hanlon, who with her husband, Louis, made submissions to the hearing said in her closing statement that the couple were not assured their health concerns were being addressed.

"We heard a lot that actually makes us more worried," she said. "The stress of this is just terrible on people."

Questions over bond needs

THE county development plan, 2012-2018, that county councillors approved this summer does not include explicit references to bonds required for reinstatement in the case of wind farms, the An Bord Pleanála oral hearing heard.

John Evans, representing the Glenties Wind Farm Information Group, said that the previous development plan called for a security or bond mechanism for all areas to be reinstated at the completion of the works. However, he said, he understood the new county development plan, approved by councillors this summer, does not specifically mention this.

Frank Sweeney, senior executive planner with the county council, told the oral hearing that there is nothing in the current county development plan regarding the use of bonds to ensure reinstatement when it comes to wind farms.

He said the council rely on national guidelines, but added, "My understanding is the national guidelines don't say too much in terms of the issue of the bonds."

See Thursday's Donegal Democrat for more from the An Bord Pleanála oral hearing held in Glenties over the past two weeks.

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