



The silent clearance of North Kerry

*Let's grow hemp
rather than wind
turbines!*

by Kate Carmody

NORTH KERRY has become the 'renewable energy capital of Ireland', by default rather than strategic design. This bountiful traditional farming landscape has been obliterated by an industrial landscape of wind turbines, situated in random pattern, at the behest of developers, and not the wider community.

Of 411 turbines with full planning permission in Kerry, only 200 had been built as of May 2017. Since then another 100 have gone up, many in my own community. Between Beal (where I live) and Tarbert, we have 25 new turbines constructed in an area of 12 miles, some straddling the Wild Atlantic Way.



**Ballybunion, Co Kerry. Pic: Hartney Photographics
www.hartneyphotographics.com**

13 have been constructed and are now marketed as the Tullahinell Windfarm.

The pity is it derived as a comedy of errors, enforced, by a bit of cute hoor'ism, on the part of Kerry County Council.

Before any Renewable Energy policy plan had been created for Ireland, Kerry County Council had granted permission for 375 wind turbines in Kerry, principally in North and East Kerry: 225 of them on Stacks Mountain, which is a protected area for the hen harrier under the EU Habitats Directive.

The gung-ho approach slipped under the radar of most people in the county and the permissions were granted with little opposition. It was only when the windfarm constructions started, that people realised what had happened. Even the National Parks and Wildlife Service, guardians of the Habitats Directive failed to exercise any clout in the planning process. Support from the powerful farming lobby and the posting of a dead hen harrier to the local newspaper stating that landowner rights were paramount, set the tone and laid a path for many more permissions. By 2007, the seeds had been deeply sown for an unofficial land clearance policy of North Kerry, orchestrated by Kerry County Council.

The collapse of the so-called Celtic Tiger prompted a pause in the escalating growth of Ireland's carbon emissions. Kerry County Council's Development Plan, at the time stated that the strategic site, located in the Listowel Municipal District, is "eminently suitable for windfarms and is reserved for such purpose". In 2012, for the purpose of drawing up a Renewable Energy Strategy for the County, Kerry County Council had to draw up a landscape character assessment. This, now infamous, assessment states "The majority of North Kerry landscapes were identified as ordinary, i.e. as landscapes of no particular merit in terms of amenity".

As regards the area around Ballybunion the Council asked itself: "Is this landscape important for scenery, tourism or recreation?" and answered "no", stating bad planning, (which they granted).

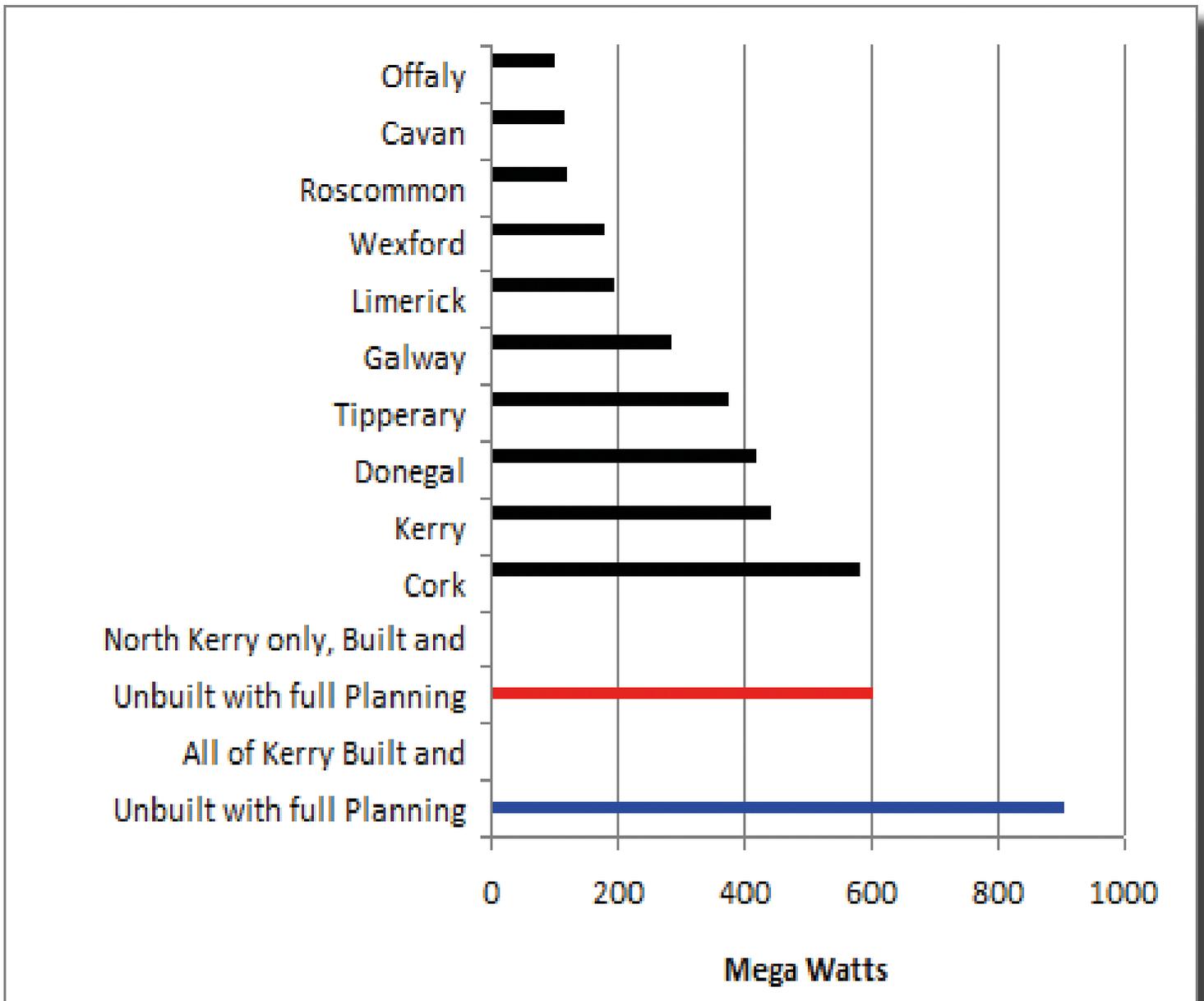
More generally on windfarm zonings for North Kerry the assessment stated "It is being zoned as Open to Consideration... and in order to properly assess the cumulative impact of numerous windfarms in the area'

And so most of the area of North Kerry has been zoned for windfarms, to the relative exclusion of the rest of the County. It is worth noting that the public consultations for the strategy, took place in Tralee and South Kerry. No public consultation took place in Listowel. People were asked at the meetings, where the windfarms should go, and naturally they all stuck their fingers on North Kerry. This was brought up at a Council meeting but the Council engineer stated that "all regulatory requirements were met". North Kerry was stitched up.

The planning and construction of the windfarm at Tullahinell has been a classic example of project splitting, facilitated by Kerry County Council. The consulting company for the farmer/landowner did a copy-and-paste job for serial applications. The planning files show that the consulting engineer, who was previously working with Kerry County Council, had a meeting with a senior planner about the applications. There were two applications for Tullahinell North and Larha, a total of four turbines. Madden's bog, known locally as the runaway bog, is so wet that it ran away into the village of Ballylongford in 1898.

On the Ordnance Survey maps you will see that two blue mud

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“This idea of managed decline, that you can simply let one of the country’s greatest regions slip into the River Shannon and opt for decay rather than renewal, shows an ambivalence to North Kerry, which still effects politics to this day”.

holes are marked on it, highlighting how wet and fluid it is.

There is permission for 10 turbines but only nine have been built. During the construction, thousands of tonnes of peat have been moved. In the Runaway bog they had to dig down twice the normal depth, I believe. For our community it has been devastating. At one stage, it felt like the seven plagues of Egypt had descended upon us as the peat disturbance evicted thousands upon thousands of lizards and frogs. The construction traffic drawing in stone, concrete and other materials destroyed what were already bad roads.

If you look at the geography of North Kerry it is mainly podzol underlined with a blue clay, a drained flood plain. Much of it is considered peat-land which is one of the reasons why it has become a dumping ground for wind turbines and coniferous forestry.

We only have to take a short spin back in history

to the Napoleonic wars, to see a much more logical solution to many of our environmental problems. Scotsman Alexander Nimmo was one of the Bog Commissioners appointed to survey the south-west in 1811. He surveyed this peatland, as the agenda at the time was to drain it, in order to grow hemp for the production of canvas and rope. It was too large a project at the time and was perceived to be too emotive as peat was being used as a fuel.

Agricultural practice has drained a lot of this peatland and now hemp has appeared on the horizon again. Hemp, with its carbon sequestering properties and up to 5000 uses, is poised to become an important component in the development of a true bio-economy for Ireland. It could also become the heart of a model for rural renaissance, by providing a truly sustainable and valuable crop for our farmers.

Back in 1971 the IDA bought what is known as the Ballylongford land bank - 390 hectares of land zoned for enterprises that require deep water access. There is also a plan to zone a further 160 hectares, giving a grand total of 550 hectares. For over 45 years, people's hopes have been raised, (at election time of course) for many different industries including a succession of dubious oil refineries, a zinc smelter, and other proposals against which most communities around the world would galvanise. The last project proposed and granted permission was for a Liquid Natural Gas plant (LNG). This has been on hold as the Commissioner for Energy Regulation, quite rightly, stated that they had to contribute to the interconnector to the UK. The LNG plant in South Wales was only operating at 3% capacity, when I last heard, due to the world commodity markets.

In a mature, environmentally-informed and dynamic society this land bank should be developed a bio-economy hub and the home of truly sustainable renewable energy. We could create a hemp processing industry, a bio-refinery and an anaerobic digester. The deep water facility would mean that we could facilitate importation of (biological and organic) waste.

The hemp plant is carbon-dioxide sequestering, hempcrete makes a great building material, which is fire resistant and non-toxic. The oils of the plant, for example CBD oil, have many pharmaceutical applications. Oil generated from hemp seeds can be converted to plastics, that biodegrade in 12 months, the oil can be used in the food industry and also converted to biodiesel etc. The list of uses for the plant seems endless to me and what does it love, wet, boggy ground!

Please let us grow hemp rather than wind turbines, to arrest the unofficial land clearance. 🇮🇪

Wind Energy in Ireland

- Ireland will achieve and exceed its target of 40% of electricity being generated by renewable sources by 2020. Replies to Parliamentary Questions state that 3,500 megawatts of Renewable Electricity generating capacity has been installed in Ireland (built and operational) in Ireland (by September 2017) and also confirmed that the 40% target equates to approx 4,000 megawatts.
- Nobody apparently knows, or has asked how many wind turbines have already got planning but remain unbuilt. A reply from the Department of Planning to a Parliamentary Question stated: "Accordingly, the specific information requested in relation to planning permissions granted for wind farms which have not been built and the energy generating capacity of these is not collated or available within my Department's statistics".
- The same Department of Planning is being entrusted to bring out the new long-awaited wind-energy planning guidelines. Communities remain sceptical.
- Freedom of Information replies show that individual local authorities are not collating this information.
- Of Kerry's 411 turbines with full planning permission, only 200 had been built at May 2017, with another 100 in progress and another 100 yet to be commenced. Kerry is the only County to produce this information – perhaps realisation is dawning in Kerry.
- The "40%" target is misleading. Eirgrid states that the 40% target equates to 4,000 megawatts while at the same time, the *maximum* daily electricity demand in the 26 counties is between 4,000 and 4,500 megawatts. So in Ireland, 40% equals 100%!!
- The Public Service Obligation (PSO) levy subsidy contracts with wind-farm companies are for 15 years. The Government has tied the consumer into these agreements in what has become a mature industry. The more wind energy that is produced, for export, the higher the PSO levy will be and the higher the cost to the consumer. The consumer is directly subsidising this industry, not the Govt, to the tune of approx €100 pa per household, €300m pa. (See the reverse of your bill.)
- Ireland's target to reduce our carbon emissions is 16% (a totally different target from the 40% electricity target). The intention was to achieve the 16% emissions target by looking at three items, electricity generation, transport and industry. It was originally envisaged to have a target of 20% of our electricity generated by wind by 2020 until our Government got involved and decided to "do the right thing" and double it to 40% as a "National Policy" without a strategic plan and without looking at the consequences.
- Export is the goal. Eirgrid are planning to build the "Celtic Interconnector" to export this excess electricity, mainly to France. We are clearly standing in the path of a runaway train.
- Kerry, with 411 planned turbines will produce in excess of 900MW, or 20% of the national maximum daily demand for electricity. North Kerry with 270 of those turbines will produce two-thirds of that or 14% of the national maximum daily demand for electricity. There is no limit set by Kerry county council to the number of turbines to be allowed in North Kerry. The Council's strategy states: "it is plan-led rather than target driven." Council's written policy is to "maximise the wind energy potential of the county" without having the foresight to set any limit on the number to be permitted.