



Fianna Fáil Policy Paper on Wind Energy

Executive Summary

Fianna Fáil's comprehensive policy proposals for new wind energy planning guidelines and community benefits will ensure that Irish planning in this sector reflects international best practice. These proposals will also protect the local communities from excessive intrusion from wind turbines while providing clarity and guidance to wind energy firms in the planning and development of new wind farms.

Our proposals will:

- **Replace outdated wind planning guidelines with new guidelines on a statutory footing.**
- **Commission a full economic review of wind energy, its impact on energy prices and its long term sustainability in supplying the Irish national grid.**
- **Ensure all county development plans have a wind energy strategy which has been submitted for public consultation in advance of any wind turbine construction in that county.**
- **Introduce a minimum distance restriction on wind turbines from residential properties. Wind turbines will be kept a distance of six times the height of the wind turbine away from residential property.**

- **Introduce a new community share options scheme on proposed wind farms where the local community must be given the option of purchasing a minimum of 20% ownership of wind farms in their area, creating a sustainable wealth source for the local community.**
- **Introduce a new compensation provision for properties with a decreased property value as a result of the construction of the wind turbines.**
- **Introduce new noise and shadow flicker restrictions which reflect international best practice.**
- **Examine the potential of increasing the number of off-shore wind farms in Ireland and map areas where this development could take place.**

Introduction

Fianna Fáil firmly believes renewable energy is part of the solution to reduce Ireland's massive dependence on energy imports. The pursuit of renewable energy in Ireland offers the potential to shield Ireland from ever rising oil and gas prices and help reduce our CO2 emissions. However, it is vital that renewable energy projects are developed in a sensitive manner to the environment around them and that they will benefit the local community.

The increasing number of planning applications for wind farms means that legislative guidelines must be introduced to protect local communities from dramatic intrusion on their properties and to give certainty to planners in this area. The construction of larger, technologically advanced wind farms must be conducted in line with international best practice. Fianna Fáil advocates the adoption of Danish style planning rules for these projects.

Fianna Fáil is committed to the development of renewable energy in Ireland where proper planning guidelines are laid down in legislation. We see the development of renewable energy as a mechanism to reduce our dependence on energy imports while also being a conduit for increasing prosperity in rural Ireland.

The Potential of Wind Energy

Ireland imports over 88% of its energy resources, largely consisting of gas and oil. This makes our energy market vulnerable to external energy shocks caused by both political and economic change in the wider world. Our reliance on imports means Ireland's energy market is like a bottle cork floating in a very large and turbulent sea. This must change.

Wind energy has immense potential to provide a major renewable, environmentally friendly source of energy in Ireland. The 2009 renewable energy directive set Ireland a binding target where at least 16% of our energy requirements should come from renewable sources by 2020.

By the end of 2011, we had reached 6.4% of overall energy consumption from renewable sources while wind's share of the electricity market now stands at an average of 18% of the market, this at times rising to 50% of electricity supply. Ireland aims to achieve 40% in the renewable electricity market by 2020.

In order to achieve these targets, wind energy must part of a renewable energy mix. Our proposals will ensure that local communities are consulted, protected and prosper from renewable energy while also ensuring that wind energy planners have certainty when devising future wind farms in Ireland.

Current Challenges

Larger Turbines and Long Term Sustainability

The increasing size of wind farms and height of turbines has created understandable concern among many communities located near proposed new wind farm sites. Communities often feel that they have not been consulted properly before planning is granted for wind farm construction. This must be addressed.

The increase in the number of planned wind farms has created a fear amongst residents living near proposed wind farms that noise and an impact on the aesthetic view will have a negative impact on their daily lives. The threat of shadow flicker on their homes is also a concern.

New technology has resulted in the production of larger wind turbines which are now being constructed at much lower elevations than in previous years.

Often, individual landowners stand to make a profit from hosting the turbine on their land while neighbours may suffer from devalued property, aesthetic impact or noise pollution. We believe the wealth generated from wind farms should be shared by all in the community who host these farms.

Outdated, Non-Statutory Guidelines

Current guidelines are made up of those issued by the Department of Environment and Local Government (Wind Energy and Development

Guidelines), the Environmental Protection Agency's Guidance Note on Noise Assessment of Wind Turbine Operations at EPA Licensed Sites and the voluntary Irish Wind Energy Industry Best Practice Guidelines which were published in March 2013. None of these guidelines have statutory power.

Since many of these guidelines have been issued, the accumulation of wind farms in certain areas has increased dramatically. The construction of these farms is now taking place at lower elevations, turbines are much taller and some industrial operators have established auto-production wind turbine sites.

The Irish Wind Energy Association guidelines are the main source for community interaction by wind farm developers but are voluntary in nature and have been developed by the industry. These have been endorsed by Minister Rabbitte but new guidelines for exporting wind farms are to be issued within the next 12 months. Experience has shown in other markets that industry regulation alone will not serve the general public effectively.

Fianna Fáil Proposals

Fianna Fail believes that legislative guidelines must be introduced to protect local communities and allow them share in the wealth generated by wind energy resources in their area.

The construction of larger, technologically advanced wind farms must be conducted in line with international best practice. Fianna Fáil advocates the adoption of Danish style planning and benefit systems in this area.

The Government must now bring forward statutory guidelines in order to regulate this expanding energy sector, clarifying existing guidelines and protecting local communities.

Our provisions reflect the Danish style of wind farm planning and are some of the most comprehensive in the European Union. Our proposals are outlined below:

County Development Plan Wind Strategy and Public Consultation

Many counties have developed a specific strategy to deal with the planning of wind farms in their area. This practice should be adopted by all counties which have the potential for possible wind farm development. The plan should reflect the wind resources of an area to ensure the sustainable, long term viability of the wind farm.

Communities must be central in the development of these strategies. Public consultation must take place in advance of the wind energy strategy being agreed in the county development plan. Public

meetings in areas being considered for wind energy sites with information surrounding the potential of development in those areas must be held with the representatives of both the council and the wind energy firm present.

Integrating these plans into the larger county development plan will give clarity to residents and planners alike by mapping out acceptable areas where wind farms may be established. Any planning decisions relating to wind farms must give due recognition to the county development plan's wind strategy formulated by the elected representatives in that county.

Economic Review

Fianna Fáil believe it is now time to commission a full economic review of wind energy, its impact on energy prices and its long term sustainability in supplying the Irish national grid. The REFIT scheme has been successful in bringing new wind energy farms on stream. However, the costs of guaranteeing a specific price to wind energy suppliers may have resulted in higher energy costs to the energy consumer. The high variation of wind energy produced on a week by week basis must also be examined in light of grid sustainability.

To illustrate this point, only 43 MWs of wind energy were produced during the week beginning on 30th September 2013 according to the Commission for Energy Regulation. Yet a new record for wind generation of 1,769 MW was set on 17 December 2013. That is a variation of 1726 MWs on our Grid, which represents more than half our energy needs in the summer. The impact of this variation and the planning that is required as a result must be examined fully.

Minimum Distancing

Fianna Fáil proposes that there will be a minimum distance of six times the height of the wind turbine between the wind turbine and any residential dwelling.

This will ensure that current regulations do not become outdated as the size and scale of the wind turbines increase over time.

This proposal should ensure that residents and local communities are protected from undue intrusion from wind farms. It will also provide clarity to future planners of wind farms as to where they have the potential to construct new turbines.

New Noise Pollution Restrictions

Ireland needs to enact the best international guidelines for restrictions on noise pollution. Following international best practice, Fianna Fáil proposes that any noise created by a wind turbine does not exceed the noise limits specified in the World Health Organization Guidelines for Community Noise (1999), or any equivalent or replacement document for residential properties which are near wind turbines.

New Shadow Flicker Restrictions

Shadow flicker occurs where the blades of a wind turbine cast a shadow over a window in a nearby house and the rotation of the blades causes the shadow to flick on and off. It can create significant distress to those who are exposed to it. In line with best practice an engineer's report outlining the possibilities of shadow flicker must be

conducted. Shadow flicker must not pass over any residential dwelling for more than 10 hours on average per year as a result of the operation of wind turbines.

Community Shareholder Option

Fianna Fáil believes that the local community should be given the option of benefiting from the presence of wind energy resources in their communities. We believe these communities should be offered the option to purchase a minimum of 20% of the proposed wind project in their area so that they can share in the wealth that this project would create. The developer must advertise locally shares equal to the minimum of 20% of the project value (cost price).

Any citizen who is at least 18 years of age and lives within eight times the height of the new turbine would be eligible and has priority entitlement to buy into the local project. The shareholder will share the profits, risk and costs on an equal footing with the developer. Remaining shares not bought by these citizens within the original radius will be offered to permanent residents in the rest of the county.

This provision could provide the basis for a sustainable and prosperous rural Ireland in areas where economic activity is low and employment prospects remain challenging.

Property Compensation

Fianna Fáil proposes that in the rare case where a property owner believes his property has been devalued as a result of the construction of wind farms, they are entitled to seek compensation.

If a residential property is present within eight times the height of a wind turbine, estimation should be carried out free of charge regarding the possible depreciation of the property value by an independent assessor. If the loss is more than 1%, full compensation of the loss in property value should be paid to the owner by the wind farm developer.

Owners of wind turbines have to pay the compensation. There shall be no state liability for any of these provisions. It must be clear that there is a direct link between the construction of the wind turbine and the loss of property value.

Examine Off-Shore Potential

The potential for the development of off-shore wind farms needs to be examined further and suitable areas should be mapped. Off-shore wind energy would not offer the same level of difficulties with regard to planning and its impact on the local community as on-shore wind farms do. Denmark has made a policy decision in recent years to pursue any new wind energy farms in off-shore areas. Fianna Fáil believes this may offer a way forward for the wind energy industry in Ireland.

Conclusion

Now is the time to introduce legislative guidelines that protect local communities and allows them to share in the wealth generated by our natural wind resources. Our proposals provide a clear outline for wind energy planners and ensure that Ireland's wind energy sector is sustainable in the long term.

Our proposals will ensure that communities are consulted well in advance of any construction work commencing as county councils integrate their wind energy strategies into the county development plan after large scale and comprehensive consultation with the community.

Our proposals will also introduce comprehensive legislative guidelines for minimum distancing from residential property as well as internationally approved noise restrictions and a strict limit on any shadow flicker affecting residential properties.

These proposals provide the best balance between protecting local communities from excessive intrusion from wind farms while also providing clarity to wind energy firms who seek to develop new wind turbine sites in Ireland.