

Senior Executive Officer  
Central Planning Unit  
Donegal County Council  
County House  
Lifford  
Co. Donegal  
F93 Y622

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POSTAL ADDRESS:  
Unit C Building 4200,  
Cork Airport Business Park  
Cork  
Ireland

PHONE:  
+353 21 242 7786

INTERNET:  
[www.statkraft.no](http://www.statkraft.no)

E-MAIL:  
[post@statkraft.com](mailto:post@statkraft.com)

VAT REG.NO.:

**Re: Proposed Variation to the County Donegal Development Plan 2018-2024 (As Varied) in respect of a Wind Energy Policy Framework**

A Chara,

Statkraft Ireland Limited (Statkraft Ireland) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to Donegal County Council (DCC) regarding the proposed variation to the County Development Plan (DCDP) 2018-2024. This submission has been prepared pursuant to the public notice inviting written observations and comments from interested parties.

Statkraft Ireland is part of the Statkraft group. Statkraft is a leading company in hydropower internationally Europe's largest generator of renewable energy. The Group produces hydropower, wind power, solar power, gas-fired power and supplies district heating. Statkraft is a global company in energy market operations. Statkraft has 3600 employees in 15 countries. As a Norwegian state-owned utility, Statkraft is a solid, dependable partner, committed to playing a leading role in the Irish Energy Market.

Statkraft Ireland develops, owns and operates renewable production facilities and is also involved in the trading and origination of power from our own projects and those of third parties. Statkraft Ireland's aim is to play a significant role in Ireland's transition to becoming a low carbon economy. Statkraft Ireland employ a highly experienced team, who collectively have over 20 years' experience within the wind energy sector in Ireland and are committed to contributing towards a low carbon future for the Country in line with our 80x30 targets. Statkraft Ireland has a significant pipeline of onshore wind, solar, and grid services as well as offshore wind, and in this context hopes to be able to contribute towards Ireland's 2030 targets through the use of many different technologies.

The updated National Climate Action Plan (CAP) 2021 has set out an ambitious 80% target for renewable energy production out to 2030. To meet this target, the amount of electricity generated from renewables will have to be doubled on current figures. Figure 11.5 (see below) of the CAP illustrate Ireland's projected renewable electricity production requirements to meet the now 80% target. Based on the CAP assumptions, onshore wind will provide a large quantity (approx. 3.5MW) of the required electricity yield out to 2030.

**Table 11.5 – Potential Metrics to Deliver Further Abatement in Electricity**

Key Metrics	KPI 2030		Additional Abatement Impact, MtCO <sub>2</sub> eq.
<b>Core Measures</b>			
Share of Renewable Electricity, %	Up to 80		6-8
Indicative Onshore Wind Capacity, GW	Up to ~8 *		
Indicative Offshore Wind Capacity, GW	At least ~5 *		
Indicative Solar PV Capacity, GW	~1.5-2.5 *		
<b>Further Measures</b>			
Zero-emission Gas Generation, TWh	1-3		0.2-0.4

\* Electricity technologies will compete with each other on cost through competitive auctions

Taking this into consideration, Statkraft Ireland supports DCC’s new objective (E-O-7) *“To secure the maximum potential from the wind energy resources of the planning authority’s area commensurate with supporting development that is consistent with proper planning and sustainable development”*. However, Statkraft Ireland are concerned that a number of the other new objectives and amendments proposed in this variation will severely and significantly limit future wind energy development in the county.

Specifically, it is noted that DCC is proposing to continue with the setback policy *“of ten times the tip height of proposed turbines from the nearest part of the curtilage of residential properties and other centres of human habitation”* for reasons with regard to visual amenity, noise and shadow flicker. Statkraft Ireland notes that DCC itself acknowledges that the proposal for a ten times tip height setback *“is at variance with SPPR2”* of the Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines (December, 2019). Additionally, this stance has been taken as a result of a non-Executive report submitted to the Council, however, there appears to be no clear scientific basis to justify this specific constraint of ten times tip height setback. As this will severely constrain the available area for potential wind energy development, Statkraft Ireland urges DCC to remove this policy within the proposed new objectives E-P-23 and E-P-24.

Statkraft encourages the Council in its preparation of the Variation to the CDP to present a clear strategy in relation to wind energy development which sets maximum targets and identifies geographical areas where wind energy development is encouraged or permissible. Statkraft suggests that in making the Variation, Donegal County Council has regard to the SEAI document entitled *‘Methodology for Local Authority Renewable Energy Strategies’* (LARES) which was developed to provide local authorities with assistance in the preparation of more comprehensive renewable energy strategies for their areas.

Statkraft Ireland is extremely concerned with the approach taken by the Donegal County Council in relation to the mapping of areas deemed *“Open To Consideration”*, *“Acceptable In Principle”* and *“Not Normally Permissible”*.

Although the proposal that areas be designated as “Acceptable in Principle” is welcomed, it is noted that this area is a very small portion of the Donegal area retained to the southeast corner of the county. It is clear from an analysis between the proposed variation wind energy map, and the wind energy map that was removed by High Court Order that the approach of the Council has not changed. This approach aims to significantly reduce areas deemed “Open To Consideration” to such an extent that future greenfield development of wind farms in the county will not be practically possible when considered in tandem with the proposed ten times tip height setback restriction.

It is noted that a significant portion of the county is contained within the category ‘Not Normally Permissible’ and that this has been substantially influenced by the inclusion of the Landslide Susceptibility Mapping carried out by Geological Survey Ireland (GSI). However, we are compelled to question the validity of using this mapping as a blanket restriction for all wind energy development within the county. The methodology applied by GSI to complete this mapping, the Unique Condition Unit (UCU), is based on the following concept: “...if a landslide has occurred in a particular set of conditions, then if those conditions occur elsewhere those locations would also be susceptible to landslides”. This is a high-level approach that does not reflect the actual susceptibility of a landslide occurrence with respect to any proposed or ongoing activity in any particular area. Additionally, this approach does not take into account if, historically, there has been no recorded landslide events in a given area. As a result, there are large areas with some level of landslide susceptibility within which there are no recordings of landslide events. It is our opinion that a case-by-case basis approach is more appropriate for identifying areas with regards to peat stability. In this regard, Statkraft Ireland agree with the inclusion of new objective (E-P-26) to ensure wind development applications are “accompanied by a ‘Peat Stability Risk Assessment Report’”. However, we urge DCC to remove the Landslide Susceptibility Mapping as a constraint from Map 8.2.1 ‘Wind Energy’, to allow for additional wind energy potential within the County to be considered.

Statkraft Ireland is concerned with the negative approach to future greenfield wind development by the inclusion of the areas allegedly being sensitive from a Fresh Water Pearl Mussel perspective in the area deemed “Not Normally Permissible”. Although we cannot comment on the EPA submission, the proposal to exclude the entire river catchment areas is being put forward without merit, as experience with wind farms in Ireland has shown that it is clearly possible to undertake successful Freshwater Pearl Mussel surveys and assessment, and to design mitigation measures to protect this sensitive species. Statkraft Ireland fails to see the premise under which the five catchments were identified, and vast swathes of the county arbitrarily excluded from being permissible, considering the lack of reasoning or new evidence base for such a provision around a single species.

This type of blanket ban on individual species designation is not recommended by the National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) and it runs contrary to specific EU Commission advice on the implementation of Natura 2000 regulations which states that: “*The Habitats Directive does not, a priori, exclude wind farm developments in or adjacent to Natura 2000 sites. These need to be judged on a case-by-case basis*”. The aim of the Natura 2000 Network is to protect vulnerable habitats and species across their natural range in Europe and ensure that they are restored to, or maintained at, a favourable conservation status. It is important to note that Natura 2000 is not a system of strict nature reserves where all human activities are excluded. While the network does include nature

reserves, most of the land is privately owned and also plays host to various essential infrastructure such as roads, and public utilities such as electricity transmission and distribution systems, energy generation etc, as well as other land uses and activities. Therefore, the emphasis is on ensuring that management is sustainable, both ecologically and economically. Taking the aforementioned into account Statkraft Ireland requests DCC to remove Part 2 (c) from the proposed new policy E-P-12 which states: “Donegal County Council will generally not support wind energy proposals within 1km of Special Protection Areas” and to remove the Natura 2000 sites from the “Not Normally Permissible” category of the proposed new Map 2.8.1.

Statkraft Ireland’s analysis shows that the total area deemed “Open To Consideration” in the proposed variation has remained to be significantly decreased by as much as 40%, from the previous CDP 2012-18 mapping. The proposed mapping would see only 20% of the total area of Donegal being classed as “Open To Consideration”. However much of this area is disbursed in very small patches across the county, which makes greenfield wind development essentially impractical. When one assumes that a nominal tip height of 170m will result in a 1.7km setback from houses, there is only a miniscule 0.7% of the county remaining as “Open to Consideration” for future wind development. It must be noted that turbine tip heights currently being permitted in other jurisdictions are in excess of the assumed tip height used for the above assessment and some are up to 187m (ABP Ref. 306924). Evidently, this is completely contrary to the proposed new objective E-O-7 mentioned above. Furthermore, the exception to the setback policy as outlined in objective E-P-22 (Part 2b) provides no genuine relief from these constraints as providing written confirmation from all landowners within a radius of ten times tip height would be an unrealistic and infeasible task. In this regard, we implore DCC to re-evaluate these proposed policies.

Statkraft Ireland wholly welcomes policy E-P-22 which states *“It is a policy of the Council to ensure that the proponents of wind energy projects have: a. Meaningfully and properly consulted with the local community and facilitated public participation in developing their proposals; and b. Demonstrated how the proposed development will be of enduring economic benefit to the communities concerned, through a form of community investment/ownership, benefit or dividend, or similar”* and additionally objective E-P-25 which states *“It is a policy of the Council to require the preparation and effective implementation of Environmental Management Plans (EMPs) to manage the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of windfarms...”*. Statkraft Ireland believes in the plan led development of onshore wind developments with community consultation and environment as important elements of this planning process.

Onshore wind developments have an extremely important role to play in the development of any viable and sustainable renewable energy mix, and while we recognise DCCs contribution to the national wind fleet to date, this needs to be supported further by DCC. Statkraft Ireland is committed to developing suitable and appropriate renewable energy projects in line with the 2021 CAP. DCC has a responsibility to offer developers every opportunity to bring forward projects that can deliver climate action.

Statkraft Ireland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the preparation of the Proposed Variation to the County Donegal Development Plan 2018-2024 (As Varied) and looks forward to engaging constructively with Donegal County Council throughout the variation process.

Mise le Meas,



**Adrian Garvey**

Assistant Project Manager, EN

**Statkraft AC**

Building 4200,

Cork Airport Business Park,

Cork,

Ireland

[www.statkraft.com](http://www.statkraft.com)

