



Submission to the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

On

A Draft National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2014-2024

Coastal Concern Alliance

August 2014

Coastal Concern Alliance (CCA) is an independent, voluntary citizens' group established in 2006 to campaign for reform of the Foreshore Act 1933 governing construction in Irish waters and the introduction of integrated coastal management and marine spatial planning to balance competing interests in Irish seas.

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Summary of key points

- The provisions of the European Landscape Convention require Ireland to protect landscape and seascape
- Seascapes are an integral part of coastal landscapes. Many of Ireland's unspoilt coastal zones are given the highest protection possible in county development plans. However due to lack of statutory protection for seascape, coastal landscapes in their entirety are unprotected.
- The *Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan* produced in draft form in 2010 and adopted by the current government in 2014, concludes that up to 4500MW of offshore wind (approx 700 turbines) can be developed off the East Coast "*without significant adverse effect on the environment*".
- Such a conclusion could only be drawn if adverse visual impact is not viewed as a significant environmental effect. The accompanying Environmental Report admits that *significant data, knowledge and information gaps* exist notably in the area of seascape and landscape visual impact assessment and recommends that these crucial gaps be filled. The Heritage Council and others have drawn attention to the inadequacy of the visual impact assessment which undermines the Report's conclusions.
- This flawed OREDP, which is demonstrably developer-led, is being referenced in policy documents (Our Ocean Wealth etc) and legislation (Draft Marine Area & Foreshore Bill) as providing a framework for marine planning and permitting.
- The OREDP poses a significant threat to Ireland's East Coast landscapes and seascapes. This threat must be acknowledged and addressed if Ireland's National Landscape Strategy is to serve its stated objectives.
- Ireland's seascapes must be specifically protected. Such protection must be embedded in all relevant policy, plans and legislation. Past poor governance cannot be allowed to shape the future of Ireland's unspoilt East Coast, central to our economy, heritage and quality of life.

Background

Coastal Concern Alliance welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National Landscape Strategy. Our response identifies the ongoing threat to our coastal landscapes arising from the inappropriate manner in which two of the largest offshore wind farms in the world (with total of 400 turbines up to 160m high) were permitted in full view of the South Dublin/Wicklow coast under the outdated Foreshore Act 1933 on the sole authority of the Minister for the Marine during the period 2002 to 2005. There was no statutory involvement of local authorities, no public right of appeal and no independent professional assessment of cumulative landscape impact. The developments in question are the 520 MW Arklow Bank Wind Park 10km off Arklow and the 1100MW Codling Wind Park 12km off Bray Head, the southern arm of Killiney Bay.

The coastal landscapes of Wicklow and Dublin are unspoilt high amenity areas, central to the economy and quality of life in both counties. In order to protect their great scenic value they are categorised in local county development plans as *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty*

The marine element of these coastal landscapes is clearly an essential part of their character yet the seaward side of these landscapes appears to be entirely unprotected. This lack of protection for the marine element of our coastal landscapes poses a serious threat to Ireland's landscape, heritage and economy.

In our response to the consultation on the draft National Landscape Strategy in Nov 2011, CCA drew attention to our concerns about developer-led plans for large scale wind farm construction close to the East Coast which were being advanced without any independent professional assessment of coastal landscape/seascape impact. We recommended that seascape be given specific attention in the forthcoming National Landscape Strategy. This recommendation was not adopted. While other EU countries have moved to protect seascape, Ireland's world famous seascapes continue to be undervalued and unprotected in public policy with priority given to development of this precious resource for economic purposes.

Ireland's East Coast landscapes/seascapes are now under serious threat due to:

- The failure of successive governments to update the **outdated Foreshore Act 1933** before permitting and progressing some of the biggest offshore wind farms in the world in the East Coast near shore zone between 2002 and 2008.
- The **developer- led nature of offshore wind farm development** with developers allowed to pick out near shore sites on "a first come first served "basis with no strategic planning for our valuable and sensitive coastal zone.
- The **draft Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan 2010** and its accompanying *Strategic Environmental Assessment*, a clear example of retrospective planning ,which rubber- stamped the extensive offshore wind development permitted and progressed off the East Coast during the previous decade with no Plan and no SEA. (This extensive offshore wind farm development off Louth, Dublin and Wicklow was inexplicably deemed to be already existing infrastructure although just seven out of a proposed 700 turbines have actually been installed).
- The adoption of the **Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan 2013** by Minister for Energy Pat Rabbitte without the carrying out of the Seascape Character Assessment deemed to be essential by the consultants who carried out the SEA of the draft plan in 2010.

We have now reached the unacceptable situation where *The Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan 2013*, the product of speculation and inadequate regulation, adopted without proper landscape or seascape character assessment, is being referenced in key policy documents and legislation as providing the framework for future marine planning and development in the coastal zone.

National Context of National Landscape Strategy

This unacceptable progression of policy without a sound evidence base must be acknowledged and addressed as a prelude to the introduction of a National Landscape Strategy. There is little point in adopting a landscape strategy for the East Coast when unbeknownst to the vast majority of people and their public representatives, the construction of massive near shore wind farms which will adversely impact the character and quality of East Coast landscapes has already been endorsed in key policy documents.

As an illustration of the anomalous situation which has evolved on the East Coast, it is worth noting that the planning departments of Wicklow, Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown and Dublin local authorities did not submit any formal response to the public consultation on the Environmental Impact Statements for these developments which would clearly have major economic, social and environmental impact on their coastal areas. Widespread adverse visual impact on adjoining coastlines is predicted in developers' EIS with "*major adverse visual impacts*" predicted for protected "views and prospects" such as Howth Head, Vico Road, Killiney Bay and Bray Head.

In the worrying absence of any independent, professional assessment of landscape impact of the large scale offshore wind farm development proposed, Coastal Concern Alliance commissioned (June 2013) *An Assessment of the Visual Impact on Preserved Shoreline Views* of the Dublin Array - an offshore windfarm with 145 turbines proposed by Saorgus Energy Ltd for the Kish & Bray Banks, 10km off the Dublin and Wicklow coast. This assessment was carried out by Model Works Media, an established and well recognised firm specialising in the production of verified photomontages and in the assessment of visual impact on receiving environments. The author concludes “*Given the sensitivity of the shoreline views, their “preserved designation” and their natural heritage, conservation and amenity context, the visual impacts must be categorised as Significant, Profound and Negative*” (page 3). The Assessment is attached separately as **Appendix A**. It should be viewed in conjunction with this Submission as it shows the major visual impact that offshore wind farms, 10/12km offshore will have on the adjoining coastal landscape.

ELC – Irish Government Responsibility

Ireland in common with 38 other member states has signed and ratified the Council of Europe's European Landscape Convention (ELC), which came into effect in March 2004. It requires certain measures and actions to be undertaken to protect and manage the landscape which in the ELC definition, includes seascape. The Irish State which under the Convention has responsibility for introducing a general framework to protect landscape, has failed in its responsibility to protect seascape and coastal and marine areas. However it is not too late to remedy this failure.

CCA Recommendations for Action

1. Prioritise seascape protection

As a small Island with uniquely beautiful coastal scenery, the protection of Ireland's seascapes must be awarded high priority in efforts to protect our landscape. Given the historic neglect of seascape considerations in Irish governance, it is vital that the National Landscape Strategy attempts to redress the balance by making specific reference to seascape and emphasising that the provisions for landscape protection, management and planning apply equally to seascape.

The Strategy should set out specific measures to integrate and embed seascape considerations in all sectors which influence coastal landscapes. No Irish government department appears to have statutory responsibility for protecting and managing seascape. Hence it has been ignored. This gap must be addressed. CCA recommends that the Department of the Environment should be allocated resources to take on this role as the seascape element of coastal landscapes can not be separated from the terrestrial element.

2. Embed seascape protection in sectoral policies

A broad range of national and sectoral policies and activities can impact on landscape character or quality e.g. agriculture, forestry, marine, industry, energy, tourism, heritage and economic planning. Coastal landscape /seascape considerations are notably absent from some key existing strategies, plans and policies, e.g.

- *Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth* – an integrated marine plan for Ireland (2012)
- *Renewable Energy Export Policy and Development Framework* (2013)

All relevant plans, strategies and policies must be amended to give proper weight to the planning, protection and management of coastal landscapes including the seascape. Development plans of coastal counties should be required to have landscape and seascape objectives.

3. Recognise landscapes in law

The National Landscape Strategy must ensure that landscape/seascape is recognised as an explicit factor in decision making under a range of existing and future legislation. Legislation under preparation, such as the draft *Maritime Area and Foreshore (Amendment) Bill*, must be amended to specifically include NLS objectives for seascape.

4. Undertake national landscape / seascape character assessment

In tandem with national Landscape Character Assessment, National Seascape Character Assessment must be undertaken to underpin effective terrestrial and marine spatial planning and landscape centred decision making. This must take place at local and regional level to inform landscape policy and local authority development plans. Seascape character assessment is urgently needed. It must be carried out before any development likely to have an adverse impact on seascape is advanced.

5. Develop Coastal Landscape/Seascape Policies

Protection and sustainable planning of coastal landscapes and seascapes must be urgently developed. Such policy should be evidence based and informed by best practice.

Ireland's policy of permitting large scale offshore wind farms in the sensitive near shore zone (10/12km offshore) must be re-examined. It is demonstrably out of line with good international practice. Countries such as Germany, Netherlands and Belgium have adopted 22km buffer zones around their coasts to protect wildlife and coastal landscapes. The average distance from shore of offshore windfarms under construction in 2013 was 30km according to the European Wind Energy Association (EWEA Annual Report 2013). It is generally accepted that the future of offshore wind lies in large scale constructions far from sensitive shorelines. Technology is advancing to facilitate such construction . Ireland's policy of permitting large scale wind farms close to shore is at odds with coastal landscape/seascape protection. This policy must be re-assessed. It has been officially stated in the Dail by Minister Rabbitte that offshore wind which he described as "three times as expensive as onshore wind", is not needed to meet our binding targets for renewable energy and that offshore windfarms are to be viewed as an "export opportunity". Are we to ruin our coastal landscapes to save the landscapes of the UK?

6. Strengthen public participation

A major effort must be put into encouraging public participation in plans for coastal landscape management. To date, public consultation on offshore wind development has been totally inadequate - so much so that there is virtually no awareness of the scale of development permitted or its implications for landscape.

In 2005 ,the 1100MW Codling Wind Park was awarded a foreshore lease for construction of 200 turbines, 12km off Bray Head, one of the most beautiful areas of the East Coast, bordering Killiney Bay and Wicklow. Statutory public consultation was so inadequate that not a single submission was received from the public. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in Europe where offshore wind farms in the near shore zone are highly controversial developments attracting widespread public debate and scrutiny.

Conclusion

Ireland is blessed in having beautiful coastal scenery and seascapes which are still largely unspoilt. This beauty contributes to our quality of life, our economy and our identity. Development pressures are growing. We must act now to conserve and enhance this unique and precious resource and ensure that our marine planning is not developer-led. Ireland has the opportunity to become a world leader in protecting our coastal scenery and seascape. This opportunity must be grasped for ourselves and for future generations

Coastal Concern Alliance

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NOTE:

Appendix A – Dublin Array: An Assessment of the Visual Impact on Preserved Shoreline Views is attached as a separate document and should be read in conjunction with this Submission.