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# Residents fear turbines will 'decimate' beaches

## NEW ACTION GROUP OPPOSE PROPOSED ARKLOW WIND PARK

By MYLES BUCHANAN

RESIDENTS of Brittas Bay are calling for the wind turbines proposed as part Phase 2 of the Arklow Bank Wind Park to be placed on floating platforms 25km out to sea.

Members of the recently formed South East Coastal Protection Alliance (SECPA) are in favour of wind energy as a renewable source, but fear that the proposed project on the sandbanks, while intending to solve one environmental problem, will instead create an even bigger problem.

The proposed Arklow Bank Wind Park Phase 2 will comprise up to 70 offshore wind turbines, but SECPA want the turbines moved further away from the coastline.

Michael Higgins said: "They will have an obvious visual impact. Brittas Bay is a great place to live.

"The coastline from here to Wexford is one of the finest in Europe. It would be a shame to see it unnecessarily damaged and thrown away"

He added: "The approach taken by the EU is that off shore wind projects should be at least 25km from the coast.

"In Europe, the average distance from the coast is over 44km. With a floating platform, you can place the turbines out way further than 4km or 25km."

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## Fionnuala does us proud



Fionnuala McCormack after finishing 25th in the women's marathon at Sapporo Odaeri Park during the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympic Games. The Kilcock AC legend had to endure brutally tough conditions in what was her fourth Olympics and although disappointed with her outcome, Wicklow People...



Residents of Brittas Bay want the turbines placed further from the coast.

# Residents raise concerns about Arklow wind bank

By MYLES BUCHANAN

A GROUP of Brittas Bay residents have outlined their opposition to the proposed Arklow Wind Park on the grounds of the impact it will have on the local coastline.

Members of the recently formed South East Coastal Protection Alliance are in favour of wind energy as a renewable source, but fear that the proposed project on the sandbanks, while intending to solve one environmental problem, will instead create an even bigger problem.

SECPA member Michael Higgins said: 'It's an ANNEX One Habitat area of conservation, as designated by the EU. The habitat on the Arklow Bank needs to be protected. We aren't just talking about fish and all sea life. We are also talking in particular about birds. 30 to 35 different migrating birds use the bank for feeding and resting. There are a number of arctic terns based there at the moment.

'We are afraid that one environmental problem is being solved with a far worse one that could lead to the decimation of the sand banks in Brittas Bay.

'They will have an obvious visual impact. Brittas Bay is a great place to live.

'The coastline from here to Wexford is one of the finest in Europe. It would be a shame to see it unnecessarily damaged and thrown away.'

The proposed Arklow Bank Wind Park Phase 2 will comprise up to 76 offshore wind turbines. When completed the offshore wind farm will have the potential to power almost 450,000 homes annually, owned and operated by SSE

Renewables.

SECPA members are concerned that the wind turbines could interfere with the natural process and lead to the decimation of beaches and sand dunes along the coast.

They are calling for the turbines to be placed on floating platforms 22km out to sea so as to move the turbines further away from the coast.

'The only reason the turbines are being allowed so close to the shore is purely for financial. They are cheaper to build and easier to maintain the closer they are to the coast,' added Michael.

'Technology have moved on a lot since the development was first granted in 2002. Now there is also a far greater emphasis placed on the environment and any environmental concerns.

'The approach taken by the EU is that off shore wind projects should be at least 22km from the coast. In Europe, the average distance from the coast is over 44k.

'With a floating platform, you can place the turbines out way further than 6km. Ireland owns hundreds of thousands of kilometres of sea, so there is no need for the Arklow bank to be so close to the coastline.

'The new County Development Plan states that there are to be no wind turbines along the Wicklow coast, but somehow it's OK to place them between 6km and 13km out to sea. That makes little sense.'

SECPA members believe that the use of floating platforms is technically and commercially possible and the same method of construction is being proposed by the ESB at Moneypoint, on the west coast of Ireland.



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## Group says turbines are cause of erosion

### BRITTAS BAY SOUTH BEACH HAS LOST 20M OF SAND DUNES IN LAST THREE YEARS, RESEARCHERS SAY

By MYLES BUCHANAN

THE South East Coastal Protection Alliance (SECPA) has raised serious concerns over the rapid rate of erosion taking place at the south-end of Brittas Bay beach.

Approximately 32m of sand dune were washed away from the south end of Brittas Bay from 2006 to 2021, while in the last three years certain parts of the south beach has lost up to a further 20m.

SECPA campaigners believe the effect of wind turbines on tidal flows is a leading cause of the problem.

William Hourie said: "We have been observing the exceptional erosion of the south end of the beach

since turbines were installed in 2004, and the rate of erosion at this location is exceptional when compared to other beaches in the vicinity.

"The erosion has continued northwards up the beach every year. This targeted erosion leads us to believe a change in tidal flow has caused this serious problem."

Wicklow County Council received recent approval for a Coastal Erosion Risk Management Study at Brittas Bay and Ennereilly, with funding of €121,500 provided by the OPW.

**FULL STORY PAGE 4**



As the RNLi turns 200 next week, hear the story of how Arklow became Ireland's first station, and why volunteers at Wicklow's two stations do what they do. SEE PAGES 12-17

# Wind turbines thought to be leading cause of erosion

20M OF SAND DUNES LOST IN LAST THREE YEARS ALONE

By MYLES BUCHANAN

THE South East Coastal Protection Alliance raised serious concerns over the rapid rate of erosion taking place at Brittas Bay beach during a presentation made to Wicklow Municipal District, citing the believed effect of wind turbines on tidal flows as a leading cause.

Mick Higgins and William Hourie both addressed Monday's meeting, stating that the targeted erosion along the south end of the beach would appear to indicate a major change in tidal flow.

William said: "We have been observing the exceptional erosion of the south end of the beach since turbines were installed in 2004, and the rate of erosion at this location is exceptional when compared to other beaches in the vicinity. The erosion has continued northwards up the beach every year. This targeted erosion leads us to believe a change in tidal flow has caused this serious problem."

"We fear this erosion has been caused mainly by the impact of the existing offshore wind project installed on the Arklow Sand Bank in 2004. The Arklow Sand Bank is situated approximately 6 to 15km off the Irish coast near Arklow. The sandbank is approximately 25km long stretching from Wicklow Head to Ballymoney in Wexford and orientated roughly north-south and experiences strong tidal currents, breaking waves and active sediment transport. At low tide it is less than 1m below the surface of the sea, but quickly falls off to a depth of up to 25/30m at the seabed."

Mick Higgins has been carefully observing the extent of the damage being caused.

"Around 12 years ago before the car park was open during winter, the only access was at the southern tip. I was checking out the condition of the beach and at the last dune there was an eight to 10 foot drop on the beach of around 150 metres. The next year a further 300m or so was eroded and each year it continues to get worse."

"During my most recent visit, there was buckthorn growing around five foot away from the sand bank. It used to be on the other side of the dune so that sand dune has gone in the past year and a half. Other beaches in the area are fine and north beach at Brittas Bay is fine, but the south end is being ravaged."



Brittas Bay.

South East Coastal Protection Alliance released figures, which reveal that approximately 32m of sand dunes were washed away from the south end of Brittas Bay from 2006 to 2021. In the last three years certain parts of the south beach has lost up a further 20m. The campaign group maintain that if this exceptional erosion continues at present rates, the sand dune system will be eradicated and the sea will be at the road.

In 2004 after initial scouring around the base of the turbines on the sandbank, boat loads of armoured rock were placed around the bottom of the turbines in order to fortify their stability and to prevent further scouring.

William added: "The greatest nature-based protection to the Wicklow coast is provided by the Arklow Sandbank and should this be further compromised, coastal erosion and associated flooding will most certainly increase drastically in scale."

"Climate change is driving rising sea levels and a greater frequency of more intense storms which are currently rare events. It is noted in the Climate Action Plan that 'rising sea levels around Ireland would result in increased coastal erosion, flooding and damage to property and infrastructure'. If the sandbank is compromised further, then the protection offered by the sandbank will diminish and there will be significant increased threat to the coast."

Wicklow County Council received recent approval for a Coastal Erosion Risk Management Study at Brittas Bay and Ennereilly, with funding of €121,500 provided by the OPW.

The overall aim is to undertake a detailed coastal erosion risk management investigation

and to develop an appropriate plan to best manage the risks identified to human health, the environment, cultural heritage and economic activity.

The study will provide a baseline information on erosion patterns and the effects of coastal protection measures. This information will be used for coastal erosion protection measures where necessary. The main focus of the study is erosion along 5km at Brittas Bay beach and 7km at Ennereilly beach, to be completed in line with the OPW's current monitoring programme.

A Dumping at Sea licence was granted in 2007 following a build-up of sand on the eastern side of the turbines to remove 99,999ft of sand from the sand bank as the build-up was preventing access to the turbines by service boats. The permit holder had to liaise with the Harbour Master at Arklow prior to the commencement of and during the dumping activities.

The South East Coastal Protection Alliance don't know if those works took place, or to what extent, and have requested that Wicklow County Council obtain further information from the Harbour Master.

Ideally, South East Coastal Protection Alliance would like Wicklow County Council to provide funding for local community groups for climate action through the Community Climate Action Fund, and to provide funding so the group can join the Council in helping to establish the cause of the current erosion and understand measures that will stop the erosion at the beaches. Funding will also be required to engage experts to establish the cause of the targeted erosion.

They also requested warning signs to advise visitors, especially young children, of the risks

posed by the possible collapse of sand dunes, given that the erosion of the sand dunes has resulted in significant cliff features which aren't stable and are now considered dangerous.

Cllr Shay Cullen stated: "Brittas Bay is of paramount importance not just to this Wicklow District but also the whole county, and it's paramount that we save what we can at all costs. In my mind there is no doubt that something is causing the problem."

"I know the turbines were erected in 2004, but it probably takes a few years to see the damage. In laymen terms, the build-up really has happened in the years after the turbines were erected. Obviously, something has caused this, and it looks to be the turbines, though we are only summarising at the moment. If the erosion continues at the current rate then in a few years time we won't have any beach left to fix."

While welcoming the OPW funding allocation, District Manager Brian Gleeson advised: "There is no evidence yet that the turbines are the actual cause."

Cllr Mary Kavanagh suggested that the South East Coastal Protection Alliance liaise with Wicklow County Council's Climate Committee.

"They are very knowledgeable about where they are going with this. They provide climate funding for groups with an amount of up to €100,000, delivered in three separate strands. It might be a way for you to carry out some research. Climate Change Coordinator Mark Costello is very knowledgeable."

Cllr John Snell said Wicklow County Council could follow up on the Dumping at Sea application.

"We have to be cautious in

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**WE FEAR THIS EROSION HAS BEEN CAUSED MAINLY BY THE IMPACT OF THE EXISTING OFFSHORE WIND PROJECT**

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regards to what we say but the reality is that this is a major issue that needs to be dealt with."

Cllr Paul O'Brien said: "You don't have to be an expert to see what is happening. The south end of the beach is in Arklow Municipal District but it is affecting us all. It's not just the washing way of the sand dunes. Brittas Bay has been a sandy beach all its life but it is now becoming a stone beach at the south end."

Cllr Gail Dunne shared his own experience in trying to obtain a foreshore license for dredging works at Wicklow Harbour. He advised: "There was talk about ploughing and I just want to say there is a long process involved which includes getting a license, and they can take some time."

"The licenses are mostly issued by the Department of Housing and it took us about 18 months. The ploughing itself is done quite quickly and there is a fellow in Wicklow who can do it."