

EirGrid submission deadline "a sham", claim campaigners



EirGrid's extension deadline is "merely an attempt to get off the hook" according to CAP's Kieran Hartley.

EirGrid's decision to extend its deadline for public submissions on its GridLink Project has been labelled 'a sham' by three groups representing concerned residents across County Waterford.

In a statement issued on Thursday last, representatives of Comeraghs Against Pylons (CAP), Deise Against Pylons and the Blackwater and Bride Against Pylons poured cold water on the energy company's extending the submission deadline to January 7th.

"EirGrid's last minute extension of the deadline for submissions on its public consultation for Grid Link is a sham," according to Dermot Kirwan and Kieran Hartley (CAP), Midi Walsh (DAP) and Anne Marie Lineen (BBAP).

"Their failure to properly consult the people of Waterford during early stages of project violates the Aarhus Convention. The Government must halt the process immediately, investigate these failings and the Grid Link Project must go back to square one."

The Aarhus Convention, which was ratified by the Irish Government on June 20th 2012, has established a set of rules which underline the active involvement of citizens with respect to environmental matters.

Campaigners in Waterford, as well as in neighbouring Kilkenny and Tipperary, have referenced what they described as "flagrant" breaches of the Convention despite EirGrid's assertion that public consultation for the €500 million project commenced in April 2012.

"EirGrid admits it did not advertise its Public Consultation process in local papers in Dungarvan, where proposed routes would fall within three miles of the town centre," said DAP's Regina O'Brien.

“That failure left thousands of residents – including landowners – ignorant of its proposed 400Kv project until possible routes had been selected. The people of Waterford were excluded from the public consultations in Stages 1 and 2 – when important decisions were being made.

“This is a violation of Aarhus Convention”, to which Ireland is a signatory. The Convention stipulates that the public should be informed about ‘the construction of overhead electrical power lines with a voltage of 220kv’ and provides that all signatories to the agreement ‘shall provide for early public participation when all options are open and effective public participation can take place’.

“As a result of EirGrid’s failure to place advertisements in the Dungarvan papers, a large portion of the affected community were deprived of the opportunity to participate at an early stage, ‘when all options were open.’

“EirGrid thus narrowed its choice of preferred routes without the benefit of ‘effective public participation’”.

Said CAP’s Kieran Hartley: “EirGrid knows they have violated the Aarhus requirement for public consultation – the extension is just an attempt to wiggle off that hook.”

The project, which aims to provide a new high-voltage power link between Leinster and Munster, would involve the construction of 250 kilometres of pylons, ranging between 43 and 60 metres in height.

“EirGrid’s press statement states that they’re extending the period of consultation because they are ‘listening to the concerns raised by the public and want to give ‘plenty of time’ for people ‘to have their say’,” Mr Hartley added.

“The degree to which they’re actually going to listen to our views is buried at the bottom of EirGrid’s announcement.

“EirGrid says the extension of this consultation ‘will not result in any significant delay to the project’ – for which one can only read ‘have your say, but we’re going to push forward with the current plan anyway’.”

All three groups, believed to representing the views of 5,000 Waterfordians, contend that a comment made by Minister Pat Rabbitte in the wake of EirGrid’s announcement last week “underscores out point”.

“Ultimately only one corridor can be selected,” said the Energy Minister, which the groups described as “a giveaway that none of the following issues, namely: re-examining the need for the Grid Link upgrade, re-examining the lack of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the National Renewables Energy Action Plan (NREAP) the fundamental building block of Grid25 or an re-examination of the cost benefit analysis of Grid25 and the NREAP – are going to be considered.”

According to Anne Marie Lineen of BBAP: “Extending this public consultation does not repair the damage already done nor will it address the potential additional long term damage that may happen as a result of this ‘White Elephant’.”