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Reference: EPA Oral Hearing Landfill Licence Nevitt Lusk

I would like to make the following observation in support of the case presented by the Nevitt Lusk Action Group against the issuing of a licence to Fingal County Council for a major landfill at the Nevitt Lusk. I make these points as a resident and an elected councillor for the Swords Electoral Ward and member of Fingal County Council.

Water Supply

It is my sincere belief that I have an obligation as a citizen and an elected representative to assist in halting this landfill project in the Nevitt area because of the irrefutable evidence of the existence of an important groundwater supply.

When viewed against the backdrop of EPA reports earlier this year which raised the possibility of over 30% of the present water supply in the country having to be shut down or replaced, this issue is actually critical and deserves significant attention and protection. The crisis that existed in areas such as Galway over water contamination last year shows the seriousness of this situation and the importance of having a clean reliable water supply. I believe that my social responsibility to protect this important water supply far outweighs any consideration in relation to an alleged necessity for citing a landfill in this area. The two cannot co-exist.

I believe that Fingal County Council and its consultants failed to take into account the existence of this aquifer and the overall hydro geology of the area in preparing the EIS. I believe that they have consistently downplayed the significance of the aquifer and its potential as a water supply.

On a number of occasions when I have attempted to raise this issue at Council level I have received responses which fail to deal with the existence of the aquifer and the Council's responsibility in that regard. Rather the starting point of the responses seems to be based on defending the landfill decision rather than an actual evaluation of the real situation on the ground from a geological and environmentally sustainable point of view. I have attached responses to a number of motions which support this supposition see Appendices 1-3.

Appendix 1 relates to measures necessary to ensure an adequate water supply for the growing population of Fingal County Council. The response talks about many measures including extracting water from the River Shannon, but fails to make any reference to groundwater within the county.

Appendix 2 deals with the impact of the proposed dump on the aquifer. The Council's response states that the proposed dump would have no significant impact on groundwater users or potential - as verified by an EIS that was conducted. It fails to acknowledge that the EIS was changed on foot of new information and that the information submitted to the hearing is vastly at variance to what was originally claimed. The geology for a landfill is totally opposite to that of a groundwater supply.

Appendix 3 deals with the potential water supply in the area and what steps the Council proposes to take to protect that supply. The existence of a water resource has been established beyond doubt from expert testimony and indeed the physical evidence from horticultural suppliers who extract millions of litres of water a day. The Water Directive requires that this resource must be protected and yet the Council's response to this requirement is to merely parrot the guidelines and baldly state they have complied with them by referring to the EIS and Non-Technical Summary!

It seems clear from these responses that the existence of a water resource in the area is generally viewed as an inconvenient hindrance to the landfill project rather than a magnificent potential groundwater supply which the Council has a statutory responsibility to protect.

The two cannot co-exist. As the aquifer cannot be moved then the only answer has to be to reconsider the landfill proposal.

Necessity for Landfill?

It has to be said that despite the expenditure of millions on waste management plans and the trumpeting of increased levels of recycling, which while welcome, mask the reality that the amount of waste produced per person has risen every year. This is because of the abject failure of government to tackle waste at source. Rather than dealing with the producers of waste, they have targeted ordinary consumers, or waste receivers who have little choice in or control over the amount of packaging that is imposed upon them. Waste management has been transformed into a commodity rather than an important public service which should be provided on the best of international best practise.

It has been possible to ignore waste reduction because of the existence of landfill. Millions have been expended on waste disposal, in its least desirable form landfill, while not a single measure has been implemented to outlaw the outrageous level of packaging that exists. Allowing more and more waste disposal facilities simply delays the implementation of policies that deal with reduction and re-use.

While a landfill is particularly inappropriate in the Nevitt, the necessity of having such a facility at all has not been established. On that basis the economic and environmental cost of such a decision far outweighs any potential benefit.

Horticultural Industry

Meanwhile the potential impact of the proposed landfill on the local economy, most particularly in this case the horticultural industry is a crucial consideration for any public representative and indeed for the families that depend on this industry for their livelihood.

I find it staggering that not alone was the impact of the proposed landfill on the multi-million horticultural industry not assessed, but it was not even mentioned. The majority of the entire country's horticultural output comes from this geographic area. It is an industry with a proud national and international reputation for high standards. Such standards are increasingly valued in modern society. Any threat to this reputation or these standards would deal a heavy blow to the industry and the future or those who depend on it.

It is clear that a clean and plentiful water supply is an absolute necessity in that regard. It has been acknowledged by the consultants that the location of a landfill in this area will result in the leaking of over 100 litres of leachate per day. There seems to be a belief that by acknowledging the seepage and then advising that the groundwater should not be used as a result is compliance with the precautionary principle that it required to be adhered to in these cases.

But what precaution can this important existing industry that uses this water supply take? Put local suppliers and workers on protective notice? Not only is nobody protected in this scenario, but irreparable damage would be done to the local economy and the horticultural industry of Ireland in general. Yet this is not deemed sufficiently important to be included! In my belief this point alone undermines the entire basis of the EIS.

Aviation Consideration

There are many other reasons why this proposed super-dump needs to be re-considered, not least the proximity to Dublin airport. Like thousands of others in this community I am employed in Dublin airport. It is the key employer for the region and the predominant gateway to the country. Its expansion plans have been much debated and are well known. Citing a dump within 13km of an airport, as in the case of this proposal is in breach of International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) regulations. Given that Dublin airport is one of busiest and most developing international airports I find this choice of locations extremely alarming.

Value for Public Money

There is much riding on this proposal from the point of view of the local rural community, the national horticultural economy, aviation safety, and crucially the development of a significant potential water supply which could play an important role in the expansion of the country's water supply.

Meanwhile alternatives can be put forward for how the waste management objectives of this facility can be fulfilled without the necessity of a super-dump at this location.

On that basis why grant a licence for an activity that is not necessary and which could have far-reaching negative consequences? It seems to me that as over ten years preparatory work has gone into this project with over €20 million of taxpayers money already expended on it, that there is a feeling in certain quarters that the momentum has gathered too much pace, and it is too late to cry halt - that the project has to be seen through.

I can understand how there might be a feeling that overturning this decision would set an important precedent that could impact on other similar campaigns. That may well be, but it is the only socially responsible decision to take regardless of the short-term consequences, inconvenience or embarrassment.

Inconvenience and embarrassment can be overcome. The cost to society and future generations of pursuing this super-dump cannot. It is more economically and environmentally sustainable on the basis of all of the evidence produced to call a halt now. Far from wasting money already spent, such a decision would be far cheaper in the long run. Valuable lessons can be learned in relation to how local authorities should deal with their legal and social responsibilities in these cases so that the mistakes made are not repeated.

Councillors previously had decision making powers with regard to waste management. Those powers were removed by political parties keen to remove control of such matters from local communities. The local community in Nevitt Lusk has done an enormous service to residents in every area by the manner in which they have campaigned on this issue.

As a councillor for the area and a resident in the ward I wish to strongly support their case and urge in the interests of the present and future communities that the licence is not granted.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Clare Daly