

EXCLUSIVE THE EIRGRID FILES

Michael Fisher

The following 27 emails obtained under a Freedom of Information request are mainly ones sent between EirGrid executives and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. Some messages are circulated to other important people in EirGrid, whose names are already in the public domain. EirGrid say they report regularly to the Department on all aspects of the North South Interconnector project and that there is “nothing in any way unusual about such communications.”

October 4th 2017
Oral PQ
From: Enda Gallagher (DCCA)
To: XX (EirGrid)
Cc: Josh Byrne (DCCA)
(Copy of Minister Naughten’s draft statement in the Dáil in answer to Parliamentary Questions on the North South Interconnector)
Sent to Oireachtas:

I propose to take Question Nos 27, 52 and 53 together.
The 2012 Government Policy Statement on the Strategic Importance of Transmission and Other Energy Infrastructure states that “The Government does not seek to direct EirGrid and ESB Networks or other energy infrastructure developers to particular sites or routes or technologies.”

On 19 December 2016 An Bord Pleanála granted planning permission for the North-South Interconnector project in Ireland. The decision concluded a lengthy planning process which included an Oral Hearing completed over eleven weeks from March to May last year.

My Department has been involved in one of two Judicial Review proceedings which have been brought against this planning decision. On 22 August this year, the High Court upheld the development consent granted by An Bord Pleanála for the Interconnector. A second judicial review is scheduled for hearing later this month.

Following the motions calling for an updated independent study that were passed by Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann earlier this year, I have commissioned two independent studies designed to address the main points of the motions, as well as key concerns expressed by parties opposed to the development of an overhead line. The first is an independent study to examine the technical feasibility and cost of undergrounding the interconnector. I have approved the appointment of independent experts to carry out this study and their work commenced in August. The consultants are Bo Normark, who will Chair the group, Professor Ronnie Belmans and Professor Keith Bell. This Independent Expert Group is expected to deliver its final report by the end of January next.

I have also commissioned a study of the levels of compensation provided to land and property owners in proximity to high-voltage transmission lines in a European context. Work is also underway on this study and its results are expected in the Q1 2018.

In September 2017, the ESB published a tender notice for works relating to the project, including the design and testing of equipment. These works have very lengthy lead-in times and I understand that the procurement process will take a minimum of nine months to complete and can be cancelled at any time.

The results of both commissioned studies will be published prior to the conclusion of this procurement process. In addition, no work will be commissioned during the procurement process.

The planning process for the section of the project in Northern Ireland is ongoing following the conclusion of an oral hearing on 27 February 2017.

October 4th 2017 10:37

Written PQs
From: Enda Gallagher (DCCA)
To: XX (EirGrid)
XX,
The writtens, (actually went yesterday):

To ask the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will review correspondence (details supplied); his views on the concerns outlined by the group; the status of this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Niamh Smyth
For WRITTEN answer on Tuesday, 3rd October, 2017.

Email sent to dept @ 15.29

Details supplies

Good afternoon all,

We are wondering why there is no mention of the fact that a tender process for 400 pylons has been commenced in EirGrid’s “What’s happening now?” Autumn 2017 leaflet on the NSI that was sent to all landowners in the last week. Under the PCI process all information regarding the status of the project must be made public on an ongoing basis.

This was only discovered by an eagle eyed member of our Committee on an international tender website. Why did EirGrid want to keep us and the landowners in the dark like mushrooms? A PQ on the matter anyone?

Regards,

Co. Monaghan Anti-Pylon Committee

Ref No: 41752/17

To ask the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason a tender process for 400 pylons commenced by a company (details supplied) was not publicised in its Autumn 2017 leaflet on the north south interconnector, in view of the fact that under the PCI process all information regarding the status of the project must be made public on an ongoing basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. – Caoimhghn Ó Caoilain.

41766/17 For WRITTEN answer on Tuesday, 3rd October, 2017.

EirGrid Ref No: 41766/17
NS NOTE: the written answer is the same as Minister Naughten’s oral response above, but with the addition of one sentence in italics: “Government does not seek to direct EirGrid and ESB Networks or other energy infrastructure developers to particular sites or routes or technologies.” *This also holds true for operational matters such as tender processes or project information literature.*

There is also one significant omission, highlighted in italics: “I understand that the procurement process will take a minimum of nine months to complete *and can be cancelled at any time.*”

October 20th 2017
Resp to Regina Doherty FG re NSIC tower design tendering process – FINAL signed
From: XX (EirGrid)
To: Enda Gallagher (DCCA)

13 October 2017

xxxx
Ratoath
Co. Meath
Re: North South Interconnector and your letter of 26 September, 2017
Dear Minister Doherty,

We are writing to you in relation to your recently received letter and query relating to the publication by ESB of the tender notice for works on the North South Interconnector.

We welcome the recognition in your correspondence that this project is a critical piece of national infrastructure. Of course, we do acknowledge that you are not in agreement with the technology choice for the delivery of this infrastructure.

As you will be aware, in December 2016, An Bord Pleanála granted planning permission for the project, and the process is ongoing in Northern Ireland with a decision anticipated later this year or early next year.

We are fully cognisant of the judicial reviews that have been taken in the Republic, as well as the independent reviews that Minister Naughten has commissioned.

We would point out that we are not the sole body responsible for delivery as ESB, under the existing arrangements, is responsible for construction and will ultimately own the infrastructure. In order to meet the overall time lines of this critical project, ESB advised us that it needed to commence the tendering process at this time and we concur with this view. This was in the knowledge that the planning process in Northern Ireland and both the judicial and government reviews in this jurisdiction are still underway. However, we would like to emphasise to you that the tender process in no way interferes with these reviews, and can be cancelled if final approval is not received for the project.

In no way do we wish for this publication of this tender to cause concern to your constituents and the communities you represent, but instead it is a prudent preparatory step in terms of delivering a piece of critical infrastructure in a timely manner.

We recognise the need to continue to improve our efforts at addressing the concerns of the communities along the route which you represent. Community and agricultural liaison officers are now in place to answer queries that arise and we will work with landowners, communities and elected representatives in the area in the years ahead.

If you would like any further information on the details above or on the project, we would be happy to come and brief you at any stage. If you have further specific queries related to the procurement or construction phases of the project it may be appropriate to address those to ESB.

Yours sincerely

Fintan Slye

Chief Executive (EirGrid)

October 12th 2017

Compensation for transmission lines study
From: Kevin Hannigan
To: Claire Camus (Entsoe.eu)
Dear Claire
XX from EirGrid in Dublin has forwarded me some correspondence he has already had with yourself.

We have been commissioned by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment in Ireland to undertake a study of the compensation that is paid to property owners in proximity to transmission lines in a range of mostly European countries. The study is being undertaken in the context of the proposed North South

Interconnector which is at an advanced stage of the planning process. Three questions are of particular relevance:

What practices are followed in other countries?
How much compensation is paid?
What factors determine the level of compensation?

The study is mostly an information gathering exercise and I expect that TSOs around Europe would have a lot of information. Hence my contact with yourself. At this stage I am considering circulating a questionnaire to the TSOs but I would welcome an opportunity to discuss this with ENTISO-E in advance. I understand also that ENTISO-E undertook a review of a similar topic in recent years and I am most interested in seeing if I can obtain or view a copy of this report. I don’t know if it has been made public.

I look forward to hearing from you on these matters.

Kind regards
(Dr) Kevin Hannigan
KHSK Economic Consultants
Gorey, Co. Wexford

October 20th 2017

ENTISO-E call for help on a study on compensation for transmission lines
From: XX (EirGrid)
To: Enda Gallagher (DCCA)
FYI

October 20th 2017

ENTISO-E call for help on a study on compensation for transmission lines
From: Claire Camus (ENTISO-E)

To: XX, Rosemary Steen, Valerie Hedin (EirGrid) + 66 others including SONI

Cc: XX

Dear Colleagues,
Please find below an important message (included above) forwarded by our EirGrid colleagues. This is about a report commissioned by their energy ministry on compensation for transmission lines. This report is part of the discussion around the development of the North South Interconnector as a key PCI project. The report is due to be finalised at the end of this year or in January.

Our EirGrid colleagues are calling on the network to assist the consultant preparing the report to fit with the timelines he is working towards.

If you have any information you can send to XX (@EirGrid.com) or to the consultant directly putting XX in cc, that would be extremely useful.

Claire

October 24th 2017

Entsoe compensation report 2013
From: XX
To: kevin@khs

Hi Kevin
A colleague of mine has sent me on this copy of the report from 2013 as mentioned previously. I hope it is of assistance.

In terms of the emails to the others TSOs from Claire in Entsoe, I think you are best to give it a couple of more days and then engage with them individually using the email circulated as an introduction. Each of the various email handles will indicate which TSO they work for.

Thanks

XX

(enclosed)

entsoe

ENTSO-E Survey of Compensation Strategies for Transmission Infrastructure Developments (lines, cables and sub-stations)
Final Report of Findings.

January 2013

Summary of Findings
Legal Right to Access Land
Compensation

Other Compensation
Co-operation with Works
Indirectly Affected Landowners
Community Gain

October 24th 2017

ENTSO-E Survey Final Report
From: XX
To: Enda Gallagher
FYI (copy of above email to Kevin Halligan)

MEETING THE INDEPENDENT EXPERT GROUP

September 20th 2017

Meeting with Independent Expert Group
From: Josh Byrne
To: Fintan Slye
Cc: XX; Enda Gallagher
Dear Mr Slye,

I am contacting you in relation to the Independent Expert Group (IEG) that has been commissioned to complete a study into the cost and feasibility of undergrounding the North South Interconnector in line with motions passed by Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann in February and March of this year.

A Liaison Group has been set up within the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to provide support to the IEG in completing this work. Part of this support is to facilitate any meetings between the IEG and bodies they deem it necessary to consult with.

EirGrid has been highlighted by the IEG as a body that they wish to consult with in relation to their work. Please let me know if you or your representatives would be happy to meet with the expert group when they visit Ireland to conduct research on 17th November. A possibility may also exist for 16th pm or evening if 17th is impossible.

Please do revert as soon as possible so that I can schedule a meeting if you wish.

Kind regards,
Josh Byrne

September 21st 2017

Meeting with Independent Expert Group
From: (VV EirGrid)
To: Josh Byrne; Enda Gallagher; XX

Hi Josh
We are interested in meeting with the Independent Expert Group and are currently holding the afternoon of Thursday 16 November and the morning of Friday 17 November in our diaries while we look at what material and attendees are required.

Regards, VV
PA to Chief Executive

October 13th 2017

Meetings with Relevant Groups: 16th-17th November
From: Josh Byrne (DCCA)
To: Bo Normark; Ronnie Belmans; Keith Bell (Independent Expert Group)
Cc: Enda Gallagher (DCCA)

Gentlemen,
Hope you are all well. I am contacting you in relation to the organising of meetings with relevant groups as discussed at our kick off meeting in August.

I have contacted all the groups that were highlighted in order to arrange meetings for the dates you provided, 16-17th November in our offices in Dublin. At the moment, three groups have confirmed while one group, NEPPC, have declined the invitation.

EirGrid are only available to meet on the afternoon of the 16th so please make travel arrangements based on this. At the moment, all other meetings are scheduled for Friday 17th so it will be an overnight trip as discussed. Please let me know of any of this poses a problem for you.

Bo, would you be able to provide me with a time slot for a quick catch-up next week?

Let me know if you have any questions.

Regards,
Josh (Electricity Policy Division, DCCA)

October 13th 2017

Meetings with Relevant Groups: 16-17th November
From: Keith Bell
To: Josh Byrne, Bo Normark; Ronnie Belmans
Cc: Enda Gallagher
Many thanks for this, Josh.

I have a lecture between 0900 and 1000 on the morning of November 16 but could catch the 1135 flight, due into Dublin at 1245, which ough to get me to Adelaide Road (DCCA HQ) by, say 2pm. Would that work in respect of the planned meeting with EirGrid? If not, I could try to hand the 0900 lecture over to a colleague.

Keith

October 17th 2017

Meetings with Relevant Groups 16-17th November
From: John Byrne (DCCA)
To: Keith Bell
Cc: Enda Gallagher

Keith,
Those timings are perfect. I will schedule the meeting with EirGrid for after 2pm.

Regards,

Josh

October 18th 2017

Meetings with Relevant Groups: 16-17th November
From: Keith Bell
To: Josh Byrne
Cc: Enda Gallagher
Excellent!

I guess EirGrid will give us some background on the development options and how they arrived at what was requested in the planning application and also some insights into the drivers for the development.

As we’ve noted before, the IEC won’t get into the need case but I suppose we ought to be aware of it before we meet other parties with whom it may well come up in discussion. To what extent do you think it might be useful or relevant for us to have some insights into the perspective from north of the border? I suppose EirGrid should be able to tell us something about that.

Best regards,

Keith

October 23rd 2017

Meetings with Relevant Groups: 16-17th November
From: Enda Gallagher
To: Keith Bell; Josh Byrne

Hi Keith,
Yes, I am sure EirGrid will be able to handle a wide-ranging discussion. I think your references to background, insights, drivers etc are on the money – all of this is a backdrop that is important to your wider understanding of the project. I think again the planning report, whilst very long and tedious, is very useful as a searching-for- background tool – (link to VA0017 An Bord Pleanála Report).

A useful and oh- so- simple guide from the promoter that e.g. includes analysis of why undergrounding is not being chosen as the technology is here (EirGrid North South Interconnector Answering Your Questions document).

The counter point is all over the main opposition group’s (website NEPP).

On the northern point, I agree it would be useful for your understanding. Again, EirGrid will provide some analysis there as EirGrid owns SONI (its equivalent in NI) so the approach is a uniform one. What might be useful in addition is a committee Report re NI electricity – Electricity sector in Northern Ireland – Northern Ireland Affairs Committee – House of Commons ([web link](#)) (has a chunk on North South IC).

Look forward to seeing you again next month.

All the best,

Enda

November 6th 2017

RE: Meetings with Relevant Groups: 16-17th November
From: Keith Bell
To: Enda Gallagher (DCCA)
Cc: Josh Byrne (DCCA)

Many thanks for this, Enda. (By the way, the nepp link seems to be broken).

Keith

November 9th 2017

Meetings with Relevant Groups: 16-17th November
From: Enda Gallagher
To: XX (EirGrid)
XX,

You can see below (*printed above*) some comments from Keith on the project discussions with you.

This morning, I have followed up with all 3 consultants to see if they wish to explore any particular topic in detail. Will keep you posted.

Ta

E

November 10th 2017

Meeting with Underground Review Group – Nov 17
From: XX (EirGrid)
To: Enda Gallagher
Hi

See attached the draft agenda that we are suggesting for this meeting next week. Would you mind sending to Prof Bell to see if he wishes to amend or he is ok with it as it is.

XX

**EirGrid Meeting with Underground Review Group
Proposed Agenda – November 16th
Introduction and Overview
Identified Need for Development incl NI requirements
Options for NSIC including EirGrid proposal
Q&A**

November 13th 2017

Draft Agenda Review Group Nov 16
From: XX (EirGrid)
To: Enda Gallagher
Hi

See attached the draft agenda that we are suggesting for this meeting next week. Would you mind sending to IEG to see if ok with it as it is.

XX

November 13th 2017

Draft Agenda Review Group Nov 16
From: Enda Gallagher (DCCA)
To: Bo Normark; Ronnie Belmans; Keith Bell
Cc: Josh Byrne

Good morning gens,
EirGrid are trying to structure the meeting on Thursday a little so they have suggested this draft agenda.

Separately, I’ve asked them to consider additional questions, based on our communication, such as:
Recital of independent reports into project in public domain
Possible impact on project if amendments to planning were ordered
EMF (particularly in terms of agreeing where to refer interested parties to)

Let me know if you wish for any particular items to be added to discussed.

Also, if you have any particular questions for ESB Networks for that meeting, they are the DSO and they build the infrastructure by order of EirGrid.

All the best,

Enda

November 13th 2017

Draft Agenda Review Group Nov 16
From: Keith Bell
To: Enda Gallagher; Bo Normark; Ronnie Belmans
Cc: Josh Byrne

Dear Enda,
Many thanks for this. What you propose sounds fine to me. (I guess the question on extended delivery timescales would partly be answered by ESB Networks as they would be responsible for project management and placing of contracts).

Something I’ve found a little difficult to track down clearly from what I’ve seen online is the power transfer benefit of the development.

I’ve seen assertions that the proposed 400kV development would provide 1500MW of capacity. Is that the thermal rating of the double circuit? Given the way the system operated, e.g. secure against a “credible outage”, roughly by how much does it increase the inter-area secure power transfer capability? (That figure can’t be precise as it depends on the exact system conditions, and it would probably be a different figure for North to South flows compared with South to North. It also depends on quite what events are secured against and which can be managed by post-fault actions, but I expect that Eirgrid would have a good estimate to hand).

Keith

November 13th 2017

Draft Agenda Review Group Nov 16
From: Enda Gallagher (DCCA)
To: XX (EirGrid)
XX

I pinged on your draft agenda as requested and here is the first output. A specific technical one for your team to deal with at the meeting.

Ta Enda

November 13th 2017

Draft Agenda Review Group Nov 16
From: Ronnie Belmans
To: Enda Gallagher (DCCA)
Cc: Keith Bell; Bo Normark; Josh Byrne

Dear all,
Meanwhile I prepared a number of interim reports on projects and things are moving.

Regarding the rating, we have to get rather clear answers, because this really has a major impact on the cost of alternatives.

One element I am missing is the assumptions on future generation at “both sides” of the line.
Can this be included?
Best regards Ronnie

November 14th 2017

Draft Agenda Review Group Nov 16
From: Enda Gallagher
To: XX (EirGrid)
Cc: Josh Byrne
XX

For dispersal to the team meeting the IEG.
Ronnie’s point *appears* to follow Keith’s point that I referred to you yesterday.

Ta E

APPROVAL IN NI OF NORTH SOUTH INTERCONNECTOR

January 23rd 2018 12:56

EirGrid Update on North South Interconnector re NI Planning
From: XX (EirGrid)
To: Eamonn Confrey; Enda Gallagher (DCCA)
Cc: Rosemary Steen (EirGrid) + 1 other (DCCA)
Hi Eamonn, Enda

Below is a copy of the email which has issued in the last hour to elected Spokespeople. XX

Dear Deputy XXXX

The Department of Infrastructure in Northern Ireland has today approved planning permission for the northern element of the North South Interconnector. Approval for the southern element for the project was granted in December 2016.

A link to today’s announcement is available here:

Planning permission granted for North South electricity interconnector

Date published: 23 January 2018
Full planning permission for the 400kV overhead electricity line, known as the North South Interconnector has been granted. The proposed development will create a cross border electricity line with the Republic of Ireland.

The Department has today published the independent report prepared by the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) following a public inquiry into the proposal held in February 2017. During the four day hearing the Commission heard submissions and considered evidence from all parties before presenting its findings to the Department. The PAC report includes full consideration of the planning issues and recommends that planning permission is granted. Importantly, the report endorses the significant strategic importance of the development for Northern Ireland at an international, national and regional level and its compliance with planning policy.

In arriving at the final decision the Department carefully considered and agreed with the independent report and recommendations of the PAC, which states there is an urgent and compelling need for the proposed development.

The Department considered that it is in the public interest to take this decision, without further delay, given the strategic importance of the project for the region.

Notes to editors:
Planning applications O/2009/0792/F and O/2013/0214/F were submitted on 15 December 2009 and 30 April 2013 respectively. The applicants are the Systems Operators Northern Ireland (SONI).

The applications are for Regionally Significant development under Section 26 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011 and was processed by the Department for Infrastructure’s Strategic Planning Division.

O/2009/0792 was for the erection of a single circuit 400kV overhead line comprising 102 towers over 34.1kms from Trewmount Road, Moy in the townland of Turleenan to the border with the Republic of Ireland at the townland of Doohat or Crossreagh and a further section of overhead line extending for 0.2kms across the townland of Crossbane.

Amendments to existing 275kV line removing one existing 275kV tower and erection of two new 275kV towers. Connection via a new 400/275kV substation at land to the rear of 152 Trewmount Road. O/2013/0214/F was for the carrying out associated works required for the erection of a single circuit 400kV overhead line comprising 102 towers over 34.1kms from Trewmount Road, Moy, in the townland of Turleenan to the border with the Republic of Ireland at the townland of Doohat or Crossreagh and a further section of overhead line