



# Marian Harkin MEP

## newsletter

Marian Harkin MEP Newsletter - February  
2014

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Dear friends,

Welcome to Newsletter No. 4! In each newsletter I try to give you a snapshot of the diverse and wide-ranging issues I'm involved in as an MEP and I hope you enjoy reading about some of the work I am involved with on your behalf both in Ireland and Brussels.

For more detailed information please see my website or contact my office. Questions, comments, shares and tweets all welcome!

Best regards,

Marian



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## I Am Hosting a Meeting in Trim, Co. Meath where Experts Will Examine Health and Cost Issues of Pylons

Monday February 10th at 7.30pm in the Knightsbrook Hotel

*Over recent weeks and months I have received hundreds of emails, letters and telephone calls from members of the public who have huge concerns surrounding the three Eirgrid proposals that will see high voltage overhead power lines criss-cross the country from west Mayo to Kildare and indeed I have met many of those individuals and groups to discuss their concerns first hand. Following these meetings and my work on the issue I was invited to contribute to a Prime Time debate with a spokesperson for Eirgrid on November 19th where I raised the concerns felt by many of my constituents.*



*Marian addressed a North East Pylon Pressure (NEPP) meeting & focussed on the health issues involved. Pictured with Committee Members prior to the meeting were (L to R) Colin Andrew, Aimee Treacy, Chairperson, Marian and Padraic O' Reilly.*

The three projects - namely the Grid Link project, which will cover the south-east of the country, the Grid West project, covering counties Mayo, Roscommon and Leitrim and the North South 400 kV Interconnection Development stretching from Tyrone to Meath are part of Eirgrid's Grid25 programme involving an investment of €3.2 billion. This huge project has raised serious issues ranging from health and environment to property devaluation. The enormous investment involved will ultimately be paid for by the public and it is their right, and the government's obligation, to ensure that the public interest is fully protected in the delivery of this project.

This requires an independent assessment of the entire Grid 25 programme including justification of the need for it at a time of major pressure on people's incomes, a reduction in the demand for electricity and, as of now, an inability on a cost basis to export electricity. We have seen too few evaluations of major infrastructural projects in the past which have cost unnecessary €billions and prevented vital investments elsewhere in the economy.

I have attended meetings in six different counties held by local groups across the country who are troubled by this programme's implications for their communities and I have listened to their concerns. I have to agree that there has been little effort by Eirgrid to meaningfully engage with the public on the issues that matter to them. A public consultation was belatedly set up and Eirgrid have now received thousands of submissions from the public, including my own which can be read [here](#).

### **Public Meeting on Pylons in Trim to examine health issues – February 10th**

Given the public's concern on this issue and the deluge of information coming from both sides I have organised a high-level conference to take place on Monday, February 10th in the Knightsbrook Hotel in Trim at 7.30 pm involving experts from Europe on undergrounding of cables and experts on possible health issues arising from overhead cables. The main speakers will be Professor Dennis Henshaw of Bristol University and Dr. Volker Wendt, spokesman and representative for Europacable, the representative body for the cable industry in Europe. The concerns of the public will be addressed by Padraic O'Reilly of North East Pylon Pressure (NEPP). Representatives of EirGrid will also be invited to participate. This conference will also include details of the latest SCENIHR Opinion on EMF and will provide an opportunity for the kind of detailed debate which the Grid 25 programme deserves and which I believe has not been had up to now.

## We Cannot Blindly Follow Plans Drawn Up During the Bubble Economy

EU Commission Public Consultation on State Aid for Energy Sector – Implications for Wind and Pylon Projects

*I am urging anyone with an interest in wind and other renewable energy developments to respond to the invitation of the European Commission to submit views on a proposal for revised state aid guidelines for the energy and environment sectors which will remain open until next Friday, the 14th of*



*Marian facilitated windfarm campaigners to meet European Commission officials in Brussels. Pictured (L to R) Damian McCallig, Donegal Town, Adviser Glenties Windfarm Group; Eran O'Donnell, Chairman Glenties Windfarm Group, Glenties; Marian and Peter Crossan, Adviser Glenties Windfarm Group.*

The European Commission has made it clear that it wishes to avoid any waste of taxpayers' money as well as ensuring there is no distortion of competition in the EU internal market. The problem is that in recent years the financing of renewables - in Ireland's case mainly wind energy, has led to an increase in electricity prices. Indeed Ireland has the 4th highest electricity prices in the EU. The EU Commission is now of the view that this cannot continue indefinitely and that renewable energy production should be getting to the stage where it can finance itself.

In recent months we have heard announcements from the United Kingdom and German Governments that they will cut the subsidies available for wind power in particular. This will have significant implications for the current proposals of the Irish wind sector in particular the export of wind energy.

Recent announcements by the European Commission on emissions targets, together with the current consultation which is investigating the level of state aid for renewable energy production raises questions about the €3.2 billion Grid 25 project and national policy concerning wind energy production.

The significant change in EU policy involves binding renewable energy targets of 27% at an overall EU level but no binding targets at Member State level. Targets on emissions reduction of 40% will be binding. What this means in effect is that Member States will have to achieve emissions targets but will be free to decide on their energy mix in order to achieve those emission reductions.

This places the EU renewables debate in a whole new framework particularly in light of the on-going Commission consultation in regard to state aid for renewables. Taken together this means that we in Ireland should reassess our renewable energy policy to take account of the changed circumstances. We can no longer use the mantra 'Europe made us do it'. We now have to produce a proper cost benefit analysis of our proposals on wind and power transmission.

This is *absolutely crucial*; we cannot allow ourselves to blindly follow plans drawn up by the previous Minister Eamon Ryan during the 'bubble' economy. Ireland's projected usage of power will in fact be less in 2020 than in 2008 according to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). We cannot commit to these huge and expensive projects without a full and transparent cost benefit analysis.

The other significant issue is the export potential of our wind energy. The UK now has the flexibility to use nuclear power and shale gas to meet its emission reduction targets. They will need a lot less highly subsidised wind power from Ireland - if indeed they require any. British tax payers will not accept higher energy prices just to import our wind when they can reach their emissions targets by less expensive means. This will have a knock on effect on our wind energy and pylons proposals and again this highlights the fact that Minister Rabbitte must now include this new reality in any cost benefit analysis he undertakes.

Renewables will continue to be an important contributor to that mix but we need to look at the size and scale. All interested stakeholders should make a submission as the final Commission proposals will have a significant effect on the cost of producing wind energy in Ireland and consequently on the development of this sector in Ireland so spread the word among neighbours, friends and family!

Details of the Commission's Consultation can be accessed [here](#).

## Harkin Report on Globalisation Fund Voted in the EU Parliament with Overwhelming Majority

[My major piece of legislative work this term was my Report on the European Globalisation Fund.](#)

### **What is the Globalisation Fund?**

The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) was set up by the European Union to assist redundant workers who lose their jobs due to globalisation or the impact of the recent economic crisis.



### **Can all workers benefit?**

No, there are a number of criteria that must be met, either 1) 500 job losses over a four month period in one single enterprise in a European Member State or 2) 500 jobs losses over a nine month period from an enterprise or a number of enterprises the same sector at regional level or 3) less than 500 job losses if they significantly effect the regional economy.

### **Have any Irish workers benefitted?**

Yes, workers at Dell in Limerick, Waterford Glass in Waterford, Talk Talk in Waterford, SR Technics in Dublin and construction workers nationwide. Approximately €100 million was available for retraining, up-skilling and “start your own business initiatives” for these workers.

### **What was my role?**

For the past five years I have been a member of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee that has scrutinised all the applications from every Member State for the Globalisation Fund. As a result of my work in this area and in lobbying for the Fund I was very pleased to be chosen to lead for the European Parliament in setting up the new fund for the new 2014-2020 period.

We had tough negotiations over the future of the Fund itself and the budget but finally after years of hard work the Fund is once again in place and will be available for redundant workers. Right now I am working with the Department of Education and Skills and the trade unions in Newbridge to look at the possibility of applying for this Fund for workers recently made redundant in the pharma-chem sector.

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## My Visit to The Vatican

*As Vice Chairperson of the European Parliament's Human Dignity Working Group I was delighted to receive an invitation to visit the Vatican and meet Pope Francis on December 7th and I wrote my monthly column for the Sligo Champion on my thoughts and feeling surrounding the experience. The article appeared in the Sligo Champion on December 21st.*



I remember it clearly, travelling to Ballybritt in the middle of the night, queues as we travelled through Knock and Claremorris. It was 1979, long before the Knock-Claremorris Bypass, but we didn't care about bad roads or traffic, we were on our way to see the Pope.

Looking back now it was a very different Ireland, everybody had flasks and sandwiches, rugs and top coats kept out the chill and primitive dry toilets were the facilities on offer. People were happy, singing, some were praying. When he arrived in the Pope-mobile, he charmed us all with his smile and his broken English - “young people of Ireland I love you”.

34 years later I received an invitation to visit the Vatican and meet Pope Francis personally. As a politician you meet, or at least see, lots of well known leaders, heads of state etc and to be honest I really don't pay much extra attention when I do. I think I have arrived at a time in my life when I now know that power is transient and no matter what the title, people are still human beings with all the faults and failings that the rest of us have. Yet when I received this invitation to meet the Pope, I was pleased, indeed I felt very honoured.

When I reflected on my instinctive reaction to the invitation, I realised that, to me, Pope Francis is not just the Pope, he is a Pope who lives his life in tune with his words. He has an obvious authenticity and that is something I value highly in any person I meet. For me, it is particularly important in our leaders - Church and State - to be authentic and Pope Francis is exactly that. Time Magazine selected him as Person of the Year 2013 and the following extract tells us why in a nutshell “For pulling the papacy out of the palace and onto the streets, for committing the

world's largest church to confronting its deepest needs and for balancing judgement with mercy, Pope Francis is Time's 2013 Person of the Year".

We arrived at the Vatican on a bright, blue skied crisp Saturday morning; there were eight MEP's, all of us members of the Working Group on Human Dignity in the European Parliament, hence our invitation. About 300 people were ushered into a room, the Pope entered and there were a number of short speeches. A smaller number had the opportunity to shake his hand and speak with him for a few seconds - I was one of the lucky ones. He radiated a sort of stillness, a type of serenity, but he was warm, so human, so ordinary and yet extraordinary. My West of Ireland accent didn't help and his English is poor, so in the end, I suspect neither of us really understood what the other said, but that didn't matter. What mattered was he knew I wished him well in his work as Pope and that I was genuinely glad to meet him.

Within a few seconds I was back in my seat and within an hour I was on my way to the airport. Life goes on, but for a brief while, I was privileged to meet somebody that I believe will be an inspirational leader in the Church and will make a positive contribution to world affairs.

I wish him well.

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## Working to Support People with Disabilities in the European Parliament

*On December 3rd, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, I spoke at a seminar organised by Independent People with Disabilities in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath who represent disabled people in the counties of Westmeath, Longford and Roscommon.*



As Vice President of the European Parliament Disability Intergroup, I and my colleagues are proposing a Written Declaration seeking the support of the Parliament to have an EU Commissioner responsible for disability issues. I believe this would give a real emphasis to European legislation on disability and help to ensure a more inclusive society where people can enjoy equal access and equal opportunities.

20% of EU citizens have some form of disability and this requires an appropriate legislative response at European level. Examples of this include disability legislation to assist people while travelling, accessible public websites and anti discrimination legislation and I am also involved in furthering these issues.

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## Controversial Seed Report Continues To ‘Sow’ Dissent in Parliament Committee

### [European Commission Proposal Continues To Create Controversy](#)

*As discussed in a previous newsletter the European Commission proposal for a new law on the trading of Plant Reproductive Material (seeds) was met with considerable concern and opposition by some Irish farmers, gardeners and other hobbyists when it was published last summer.*

I received hundreds of emails concerned that their activities and the exchanging of seeds would now be subject to the new Regulation and burdensome limitations. I have carefully followed the progress of the report through the Agriculture Committee in the Parliament, of which I am a substitute member, and in the last edition I detailed the outcome of a conference hosted by the Commission in June to discuss the new proposal in detail. Mr. Matteo Pettiti, of the Irish Seed Savers Association attended the conference at my invitation and we have since collaborated together to submit some amendments to the report to sections that have been raised as problematic by the Irish Seed Savers Association and other interested parties. A copy of my amendments can be viewed [here](#).



### **Latest Developments**

In the past two weeks the four main Groups in the European Parliament decided to send the proposal back to the Commission. This means that the European Commission will have to come forward with another proposal following the European elections when a new Commission is selected. I expect there will be a public consultation on this issue which will provide an opportunity for people to get involved before any new proposals are decided on again.

## Launch of Inishowen Eco Tourism Network

*I was delighted to launch the Inishowen Eco Tourism Network in Ballyliffin Lodge and Spa on Friday 13th December last year. The Eco Tourism Network is a real opportunity to develop and maintain a sustainable indigenous tourism industry in Inishowen.*



This is a superb, sustainable initiative and eco-tourism networks like Inishowen's can help to maintain rural communities by providing employment and giving communities a real input into managing their local resources. Eco-tourism encompasses local produce, local crafts, local knowledge and skill. It includes the cultural and natural heritage, biodiversity, ecology and landscape of the area and encourages and promotes environmentally sustainable practices for example energy and water conservation and waste management. Essentially it's about marketing our tourism product and managing it in a sustainable way.

32 eco-label certified businesses, including hotels, B&B's, restaurants, heritage and activity centres, are now part of the Inishowen Network which is still growing. It will be a core part of Fáilte Ireland's launch of The Wild Atlantic Way in 2014. Inishowen will be the start of the Way with the Green Trail marking its beginning. The route will be based on the Inishowen 100 route and will provide a welcome boost to tourism in the area. You can read the latest on the Network [here](#) and they also have an excellent app for the Inishowen Green Trail which can be downloaded [here](#).

Inishowen is now in a position to make use of its extraordinary potential to become a tourist destination in its own right. It will not happen overnight but all the basic ingredients are there and the Network can now provide the catalyst to make eco-tourism a valuable and sustainable part of tourism in Inishowen. A result of the hard work and community spirit of those involved, the Network shows what a small group of people can achieve when dedicated to the improvement of their local community and economy and I commend them for it.

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## Out and About in the Constituency!

[Some highlights of recent events from around the North-West Constituency](#)

### ***This Is Cavan!***

I met with Joanne Hayes, Tourism Development Officer and Savina Donohoe, Curator, Cavan County Museum, where Cavan were winners of an EU Destinations of Excellence Award for Accessibility in Brussels. L-R: Joanne Hayes, Marian Harkin MEP and Savina Donohoe. Well done to all involved – this is a great initiative!





### ***BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition***

As a former mathematics and science teacher one of the highlights of my year is my annual visit to the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition at the RDS. I really enjoyed meeting the students and hearing about their projects and I was hugely impressed with the intelligence, ingenuity and curiosity of the young people I spoke with. You can view all the pictures from my visit [here](#).



### ***Is Boxy The New Champagne?***

I hosted a public meeting in Cavan for artisan food producers of the popular potato based savoury produced in the counties of the border and West – to explore the possibility that Boxy could achieve the same status as France's champagne and Italy's Parma Ham. I am pictured here with Muiris Kennedy, Food Consultant who addressed the meeting on the possibilities of obtaining EU PGI status for Boxy.



### ***Flood Funding***

I met with Commissioner Hahn to discuss the possibility of Ireland applying to the European Solidarity Fund for assistance to help alleviate recent flood damage. I have also written to Ministers Hogan and Coveney asking them to earmark monies from the European Regional Development Fund and the Rural Development Fund for flood repairs.



***Wind Campaigners***

In November I met with Ted Kelly who is Chairman and other members of the Wind Turbine Action Group and also Senator John Kelly who oppose Dysart wind farm to discuss their concerns.



### *Happy Days*

With Liz Lavery from Louth and Meath Education and Training Board at launch of 'Happy Days' in Croke Park. This is an EU sponsored project and the Louth and Meath Education and Training Board have been the driving force in putting the project together.



I recently met with representatives of Horsecare Ireland in Tuam who are making positive efforts to deal with the current crisis in the horse sector.



### ***Roscommon IFA Dinner***

I congratulated Eddie Downey, newly elected president of the Irish Farmers' Association at the recent IFA dinner in Roscommon.



### ***Save Merlin Woods***

I visited Merlin Woods with a group of Independent Councillors and concerned locals from Galway who oppose a plan to build a road through the woods. It looks like Galway County Council will support the residents' position.



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