

# Racing titan Coolmore joins pylon protests

## Ballydoyle's Annemarie O'Brien warns that wind farms will finish the Irish bloodstock industry

**Jerome Reilly**

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Annemarie O'Brien, wife of champion trainer Aidan, said high-voltage pylons and wind turbines are the biggest threats to Irish bloodstock in the history of the industry and will make thousands of acres of prime horse-breeding land "unfit for purpose".

Ballydoyle in Tipperary, where Aidan O'Brien has trained the winners of five Epsom Derbys, 11 Irish Derbys and numerous other classics, is the training arm of the Coolmore syndicate headed up by billionaire John Magnier.

The backing of the wealthy bloodstock behemoths for the anti-ylon and wind farm lobby is significant and comes as EirGrid confirmed last week it will seek planning permission for the contentious GridWest project at the end of next year and for the GridLink project in the middle of 2016.

Former Supreme Court judge Catherine McGuinness, is chairing the independent panel examining the feasibility of placing the power lines underground.

Route proposals for the GridWest route will be sent to the independent panel before Christmas and the proposed route for the GridLink plan will be sent in later in 2016.

Some of those proposed routes will bring pylons and wind farms into the heartland of the Irish bloodstock industry.

In a lengthy article published in this weekend's edition of the Irish Field, Ms O'Brien writes: "The scale of the threat to heartland Irish industries such as bloodstock, tourism and agriculture and to all electricity bill payers from yet more costly, subsidised wind farms, and pylon blight from excessive wind farm development in Ireland is only just revealing itself."

She bluntly states that wind turbines and high-voltage power lines are simply incompatible with the breeding and training of thoroughbred racehorses.

"The natural instinct of a horse, when faced with what it perceives as danger, is flight. They run first, ask questions later. We have selectively bred them for 300 years to heighten this flight reaction, making the thoroughbred race horse the ultimate racing

athlete with lightning-quick reaction times and the ability to reach speeds of up to 44mph [70kph]," Ms O'Brien writes.

She says it is this natural instinct that makes highly tuned thoroughbreds challenging to manage and very susceptible to injury.

"They possess little sense of self preservation. Such a flight response also puts the safety of handlers and riders at risk.

"Putting wind farms and pylon lines beside bloodstock farms will render that land unfit for purpose."

She pointed to the "huge financial impact on the industry" which directly employs more than 14,000 people, as well as a supply chain of ancillary goods and services including farmers, feed merchants, vets, farriers and other vital rural jobs.

"There are many risks associated with wind farms and pylons. Low flying helicopters checking the lines, corona and low frequency noise, magnetic fields and unrestricted access to crews for the repair and maintenance of turbines and pylons would pose huge disease control issues for stud owners," she adds.

It is understood the public consultation period on the €500m overground GridLink route linking Kildare and Cork via Wexford has received up to 38,000 responses.

GridWest, the €240m project between Roscommon and Mayo, has also been vehemently opposed by locals.

The route for the €288m North-South Interconnector between Meath and Tyrone is being considered in draft form by An Bord Pleanála.

Its initial response is expected to be published before Christmas.

Ms O'Brien says that even the perception of risk associated with conception difficulties for mares could have a catastrophic effect on the flow of international broodmares into Irish stud farms.

"Mare owners have lots of choice as to where to send their stock and any increase in risk that may arise from a stud's proximity to wind farms and pylon lines will send clients elsewhere," she says.

"Even the perception of risk will damage our industry but unfortunately we have had evidence too - earlier this year, a number of valuable yearlings were killed in Limerick by a broken power line," she said, adding that it is not too late for a change in direction by Government.