

# Coastline to become wind farm

EXCLUSIVE

By John Manley

A STRETCH of picturesque Co Down coastline that could be stripped of its special designation has been earmarked for a massive offshore wind farm.

The five miles of coast, which includes Tyrella's Blue Flag beach and commands spectacular views of the Mourne, is being declassified as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) claims the stretch of Lecale coastline no longer meets AONB standards.

But *The Irish News* has learned that plans are under way to develop a massive wind farm off this part of the Co Down coast.

A recent report from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment highlights the area around Dundrum Bay as having huge poten-

tial for wind power generation.

The assessment concluded that a "substantial capacity could be developed without significant adverse effects on the environment or other marine users".

However, because an AONB designation runs unbroken along nearly 150 miles of Co Down coast from Carlingford Lough to the Ards Peninsula, connecting the wind farm to the grid could prove problematic.

According to Green councillor Cadogan Enright, the area which is to be declassified would provide the only point on the coastline where power could be brought ashore without breaching strict environmental guidelines.

Mr Enright said he supports the development of offshore wind farms but is concerned that stripping this small stretch of Lecale coastline of its AONB status would pave the way for a string of pylons across the Co Down countryside.

He said cables transporting power onto the grid should be buried underground.

The authorities are looking to strip this five-mile stretch of Co Down coastline of its Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designation. The move coincides with a new report which identifies the coastline as a major source of wind energy. AONBs impose strict environmental guidelines on development

Belfast ●

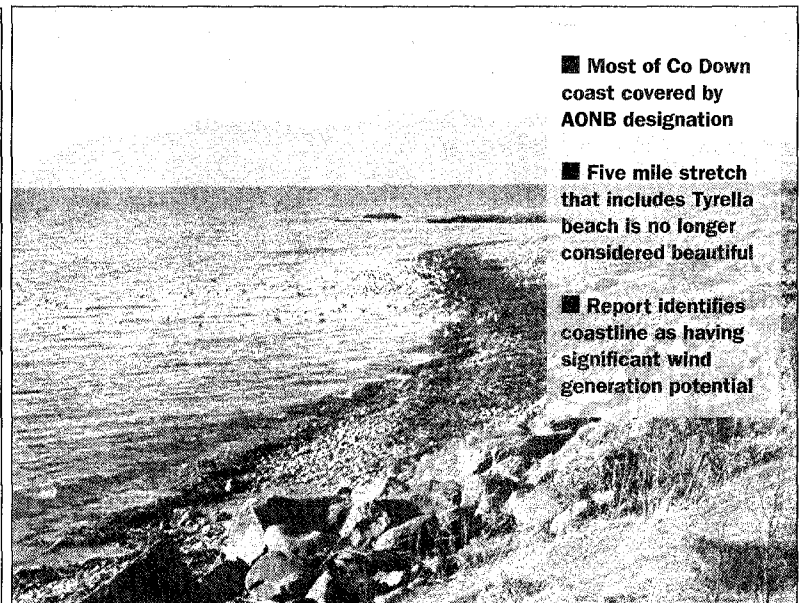
Downpatrick ●

Newcastle ●

Tyrella Minerstown ● ●

St John's Point ●

GRAPHIC: Tony Baillie



■ Most of Co Down coast covered by AONB designation

■ Five mile stretch that includes Tyrella beach is no longer considered beautiful

■ Report identifies coastline as having significant wind generation potential



"I can see no other explanation for declassifying this piece of coastline than to accommodate the infrastructure necessary to transport many megawatts of electricity onshore and onto the grid," he said.

"I regard the development of renewable electricity as vital but it

must not be used as an excuse to wreck the environment."

Mr Enright said all statutory bodies consulted on the declassification of the AONB, including Down District Council and Mourne Heritage Trust, had voiced their opposition to it.

A spokesman for NIEA said a

decision on the final boundary of the AONB had yet to be taken.

He said the proposals were based "purely on the existing landscape quality".

"It did not take account of any current or potential development proposals," he said.