

# Teddy bear maker saves hen harrier from €80m windfarm

By Valerie Hanley

A LANDMARK decision by the European Court of Justice looks set to protect the rights of the hen harrier species of bird and block an €80m wind farm from going ahead.

And according to a craft worker, who campaigned against the ambitious plan by the ESB and the State forestry firm Coillte to erect 16 massive turbines in a protected woodland and bog in Tipperary, the ruling may also lead to a change in Irish planning laws.

Edel Grace lives near Keeper Hill – which is part of the Special Protection Area that runs from Slieve Felim to the Silvermines Mountains on the Limerick-Tipperary border – where the Bunkimalta wind farm was proposed to be built.

It is a protected area under EU law because the hen harrier is deemed to be an endangered species. And last Wednesday the European Court of Justice issued a ruling that effectively backed those opposed to the proposed wind farm.

The €80m wind farm was previ-

**SANCTUARY:** The wind farm was earmarked for an area designated as specially protected for the hen harrier

ously approved by the national planning authority An Bord Pleanála, after planning permission was refused by the local county council.

The Department of Heritage was also opposed to the proposed wind farm, as were inspectors within the State planning authority.

However, the board's decision was then appealed to the High Court which ruled in favour of the An Bord Pleanála.

However, teddy bear maker Edel Grace and environmentalist Peter Sweetman then lodged an appeal with the Supreme Court, and the country's most senior court referred the case to the European Court of Justice.

This weekend Ms Grace told the Irish Mail on Sunday of her delight at the decision.

'I don't think the wind farm can go ahead

now. Obviously it has to come back to the Irish courts.

'There was a question asked by the Supreme Court of the European Court of Justice so it will have to come back to the Supreme Court and then they will make a final ruling on it. The Supreme Court will

## 'It would have meant 16 killing machines'

give the final direction. 'I hope it will be quashed entirely. This decision means that there will be more protection to Special Protection Areas.

'This has to be put into Irish law. If this wind farm had gone ahead it would have set a precedent that SPA (Special Protection Areas) status counted for nothing. This area is a bird sanctuary and if the wind



**HANDIWORK:** One of Edel Grace's signature crafted soft toys