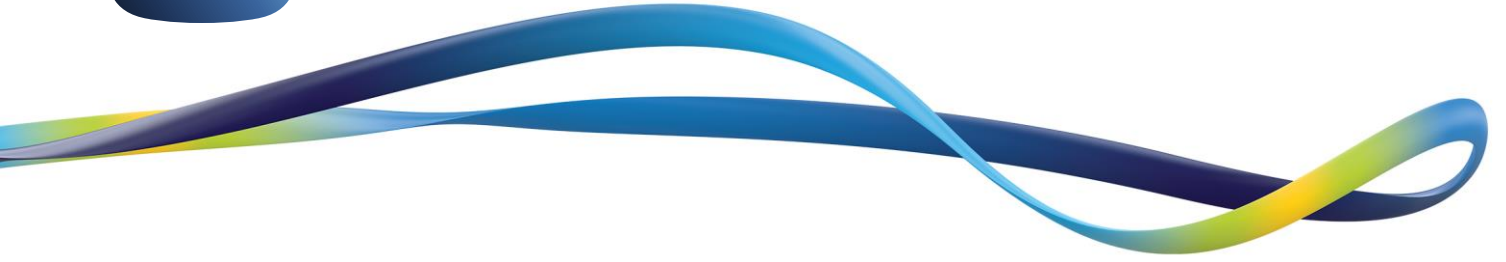




NETWORKS



# HOW STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK IS SHAPING OUR ENGAGEMENT

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## Introduction

ESB Networks provides electricity to over 2.3 million customers in homes, businesses, farms and communities across the country, enabling electricity to be supplied in a safe and reliable manner, and supporting economic and social development.

Working collaboratively with all our customers and stakeholders, we can take positive actions together to address climate change as the key challenge of our generation. Working together, we will connect much more renewable generation to the network and enable the use of clean electricity to drive carbon out of heat, transport and the economy. We appreciate the importance of listening to our customers and stakeholders to hear their views, concerns and expectations so that we are better informed in our decision-making and management of the network.

### [Comment from Demand Response Aggregators Ireland \(DRAI\), May 2020](#)

*“We believe that engagement and regular dialogue with ESB Networks will encourage an appreciation of our different perspectives and through doing so enable a deeper understanding of issues. We also consider that this effective knowledge transfer process will ultimately facilitate the design of innovative solutions that will serve to optimise the performance of the electricity system and contribute towards the delivery of the 2030 renewable electricity targets”.*

## Purpose of this document

This document is intended to outline how stakeholder feedback is shaping our approach to our engagement strategy, plans and activities. It describes how ESB Networks is interpreting our stakeholders’ needs and our proposed approach to ensure continuous improvement of our engagement going forward. ESB Networks welcomes the feedback we have received throughout 2020, including the most recent feedback received from the Networks Stakeholder Engagement Evaluation (NSEE) Panel and as published on the CRU website in September 2020.

## Report structure

This report is divided into two main sections.

1. **Section one**, describes the high-level recommendations that have been received from all our stakeholders in 2020 under several themes. We explain how ESB Networks is interpreting this feedback and how it is informing our approach to stakeholder engagement in 2020 and beyond.
2. **Section two**, addresses the feedback we have received on our Strategic Stakeholder Engagement Plan for 2020. It outlines our response to some key recommendations raised by our stakeholders and our approach to engagement in 2020.

# 1. General Themes

Our stakeholder engagement is a continuous process of listening to the needs of our stakeholders and acting upon their feedback and recommendations. This section summarises stakeholder feedback received in 2020 under several themes. For each theme we outline the key recommendations and how they are informing our approach to stakeholder engagement for 2020 and beyond.

## Theme 1: Our Engagement Strategy

We published for consultation our 'Strategic Stakeholder Engagement Framework' in December 2019, intended as an enduring engagement strategy that sets out our guiding principles, methodology and governance for stakeholder engagement. Our stakeholders welcomed this approach, and the following comments were raised;

### Comment from Chambers Ireland, January 2020

*"We feel the framework presents a very structured and systematic approach to engagement activity overall. We feel that the areas of engagement ESB Networks have outlined aligned with the policy priorities of Chambers Ireland and our network. The ten specific areas of engagement outlined by ESB Networks provide broad opportunity for our members to engage".*

### Comment from the Demand Response Aggregators of Ireland (DRAI), January 2020

*"The DRAI very much welcome and support the proposed collaborative approach to customer engagement detailed in the 'Strategic Stakeholder Engagement Framework'. Our members acknowledge and agree with the range of benefits attributed to engagement set out in the framework and look forward to working with ESB Networks to build stronger relationships".*

Our strategy identifies the current key areas of engagement such as the next price review period PR5, Smart Metering, Connecting Renewables, Safety and Innovation which we believe to be of strategic importance to both our stakeholders and business alike. For example, the major engagement involved in the National Smart Metering Programme is vital to the successful delivery of this major investment initiative and will help build awareness among consumers of the benefits enabled by smart meters, while the engagement supporting the PR5 planning process is key to the future sustainable development of the network, which reflects the needs of all stakeholders.

Our strategy also reflects an understanding of the different levels of engagement (inform, involve, collaborate) which are appropriate depending on the nature and materiality of the subject of engagement. The level of engagement that is appropriate is considered during the planning phase. This involves an assessment of the materiality of the subject matter of engagement both for our stakeholders and our business and includes an evaluation of potential impact and risk. Issues of major significance, involving high levels of investment, impact and risk, (for example the Smart Metering programme and the development of tools and systems to enable active citizens/prosumers) will warrant greater levels of engagement. Where the issue has lower significance and less impact, the provision of information may be more appropriate. In each case we will discuss our approach with our stakeholders.

#### Comment from Bord Gáis Energy, January 2020

*“Suggest more granular detail required on the steps needed to achieve the strategy and from there provide a logical plan of the steps and timelines involved to allow all stakeholders to plan and engage meaningfully”.*

In response to this feedback we will endeavour to further refine our areas of engagement into defined projects/work packages and place timelines around key deliverables for which stakeholder engagement will be an integral part. We will keep our stakeholders informed of any updates to our planned engagement activities via improved stakeholder communications.

#### Comments from NSEE panel, September 2020

*“The Stakeholder Engagement Strategy should be published early in the year being reported on, following engagement with stakeholders; or if possible, late in the previous year being reported on to give full sight of stakeholder engagement plans in advance of the year beginning. The Strategy should set the tone and expectations, detailing targets (quantitative where possible) against which performance will be assessed later in the process”.*

*“The Panel recommends that ESB Networks includes in future reports the list and timing of the engagement events, including consultations, planned for the relevant time period, similar to EirGrid’s approach”.*

As noted earlier our ‘Strategic Stakeholder Engagement Framework’ published in December 2019 was intended as an enduring engagement strategy demonstrating our engagement approach for 2019/20 and beyond. The strategy was developed and informed by ongoing engagements with stakeholder groups and their priorities regarding the distribution network.

We will engage with our stakeholders on our updated strategy and plan for 2021 over Q4 2020 and early 2021. We will set out our engagement objectives and the strategy and plan to achieve them including a list and timing of proposed engagement events, consultations, and publications.

## Theme 2: The importance of early engagement

ESB Networks understands the importance of meaningful early engagement and appreciates the positive impact this has on delivering better outcomes for both our stakeholders and ESB Networks in a timely manner. Many of our stakeholders have highlighted the importance of early in-depth engagement with ESB Networks to enable better decision making and to help work towards mutually beneficial outcomes.

#### Comment from Demand Response Aggregators Ireland (DRAI), January 2020

*“DRAI emphasise the importance of early, in-depth engagement, perhaps through discussion papers and/or dedicated working groups, which would offer our members the opportunity to provide feedback on proposals and inputs based on their experience of similar projects both within Ireland and elsewhere”.*

ESB Networks has established several bilateral meetings and dedicated working groups in response to our stakeholders' requests for early in-depth engagement. For example, we recognise the importance and contribution that our innovation forums and workshops have provided in enabling our stakeholders gain an early appreciation of ESB Networks innovation priorities and allowing us gain valuable feedback and stakeholder input into the development of any new initiatives. We have therefore increased the volume of these workshops and increased their scope to cover wider business as usual topics such as connection policy and network capacity issues.

#### Further comment from DRAI, May 2020.

*“Our members have found the meetings and workshops with ESB Networks to be an effective form of engagement - we have an opportunity to talk through market issues in detail and to present the demand side industry perspective to experienced ESB Networks staff. In doing so we all get a better understanding of how each issue affects different stakeholders and are therefore well placed to develop enduring solutions”.*

#### Comment from UCD, May 2020

*“It is important that this engagement is continued in this uncertain time of the Covid-19 pandemic and that alternative approaches are sought to continue engagement in the absence of direct personal contact”.*

Following the introduction of government restrictions in March 2020 due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, ESB Networks engagement strategy moved to a remote working/virtual platform. All meetings, workshops and forums are now being conducted primarily through Skype for Business and Microsoft Teams. Although there have been many benefits gained from these virtual activities, (such as reaching a wide audience and eliminating travel requirements), we recognise the loss of direct personal contact. We are constantly exploring new means and tools for engagement and we will work with our stakeholders to find innovative ways of keeping us all connected through these difficult and uncertain times.

## Theme 3: The Grid Connection Offer Process

ESB Networks understands the importance of early engagement for new connections to the electricity distribution network, including for large demand and generation customers and appreciates the positive impact this has on delivering better outcomes in a timely manner.

#### Comment from NSEE panel, September 2020

*“An area of concern outlined by the Panel is the communication involved in the process for grid connection. In particular, the communication around the connection offer and the connection projects processes should be improved going forward”.*

Stakeholder communication has been particularly important throughout the Enduring Connection Policy (ECP) process in ensuring eligible applicants across a broad range of renewable technologies (Wind, Solar, Batteries, Biomass, CHP, Hybrid) received a grid connection offer.

ESB Networks met the challenging timelines of issuing 95 connection offers totalling 800MWs over an 18-month period between December 2018 and May 2020. This achievement was possible through collaboration with our stakeholders including collective action with EirGrid and the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU). Specific improvements in the ECP1 process included providing project developers with more certainty in their connection offers by for instance including an estimation of the civil works pass-through costs.

ESB Networks developed the subsequent ECP2 ruleset in collaboration with EirGrid and in response to stakeholder feedback have implemented the following improvements to the stakeholder engagement process;

- ✓ initial early engagement meetings are offered to applicants
- ✓ further connection method meetings are offered to applicants to ensure that projects have a higher likelihood of moving forward successfully.
- ✓ projects will also have an opportunity to submit a preferred connection method
- ✓ applicants now also have an option to re-optimize their MW capacity application or withdraw from the process for a partial refund of application fees.
- ✓ ECP2 Projects will have a point of contact within ESB Networks who will manage queries from the applicants throughout the connection offer process
- ✓ ESB Networks are now also providing more detailed network information (e.g. network capacity heat maps) to allow projects where possible the opportunity to optimize their Maximum Export Capacity, potentially increasing their viability. Available on the ESB Networks website, the heatmaps provide customers with a high-level overview of available transformer capacity at HV & MV distribution stations throughout the country.

Stakeholder webinars were hosted in July 2020 specifically on how to utilise the capacity heat maps and to provide early information and clarification regarding the ruleset for the ECP-2 process. With almost 70 participants in attendance, the feedback received was positive and encouraging with comments including “very easy to use” and “useful tool”. The publication of the station transformer capacity information was widely welcomed, and further improvements to the functionality and presentation of the heat maps are underway in response to feedback received. For instance, the next phase of this project will include the facility to download the information published on the webpage into an excel file and the general layout of the webpage will be enhanced.

ESB Networks appreciates the importance of continuous improvement in all our major infrastructure delivery process, to successfully deliver on our challenging programme of work over the coming years. The ‘Lean Connections Project’ was established to meet this challenge and to reflect the needs of our stakeholders. This aim of this project is to apply lean principles to the delivery of the following major projects;

- Renewables Connections – to support delivery of the Climate Action Plan
- Major Load Connections – to support economic growth and development
- PR5 Work Programme, including major Asset Replacement and major Reinforcement Projects – to ensure safety, quality and continuity of supply to all our customers

The Lean Connections Project is engaging external consultants to support us to carry out a review and redesign of our end-to-end process for the delivery of major infrastructure projects by adopting lean ways of working. As part of this review we are consulting with major customers and key stakeholders, internally and externally, to get their views on what we can do to improve the delivery of our major infrastructure projects, and on the changes, we are

proposing and implementing. ESB Networks will continue to provide regular updates to and engage with key stakeholder groups as this project progresses.

## Theme 4: Working with the TSO (EirGrid)

EirGrid as the Transmission System Operator is a key stakeholder and is listed in our 'Strategic Stakeholder Engagement Framework' document under the heading of "Partners".

[Comment from NSEE panel, September 2020](#)

*"The SOs are key stakeholders to each other and interactions between them should be called out in the reports".*

ESB Networks and EirGrid work very closely and actively together at an operational level on a day to day basis. EirGrid as the Transmission System Operator (TSO) plans and permits the work to be undertaken on the Transmission system and ESB Networks as the Transmission System Owner (TAO) undertakes the delivery of that work.

Both organisations meet on a quarterly basis at a senior level. There is a formal structure of committees and subgroups managing a wide range of interfaces on technical and operational matters. In recent years, the companies have worked very closely together to facilitate renewable generation and the challenges of the national Climate Action plan.

The call for more information and reporting on how EirGrid and ESB Networks work together has resulted in an Annual Electricity Transmission Performance report (APR) being produced jointly for all stakeholders and the public. This is an extensive report which goes for public consultation and is accompanied by an Investment Planning and Delivery Report (IPD).

The challenges of the Climate Action plan and the drive to de-carbonise electricity, transport and heating will require a new level of interoperability between the Transmission and Distribution systems going forward. New European legislation and developments such as the European Network Codes and increased cooperation in Europe between Transmission System operators and Distribution System operator groupings are driving new developments and new requirements for DSOs and TSOs to cooperate in new ways. The well-established relationships between ESB Networks and EirGrid as DSO and TSO provide an excellent foundation for these new developments as they evolve over the next decade.

## Theme 5: How we address our feedback

At ESB Networks, we appreciate the importance of listening to our customers and stakeholders and hearing their views, concerns and expectations so that we are better informed in our decision making and management of the electricity network.

[Comment from NSEE panel, September 2020](#)

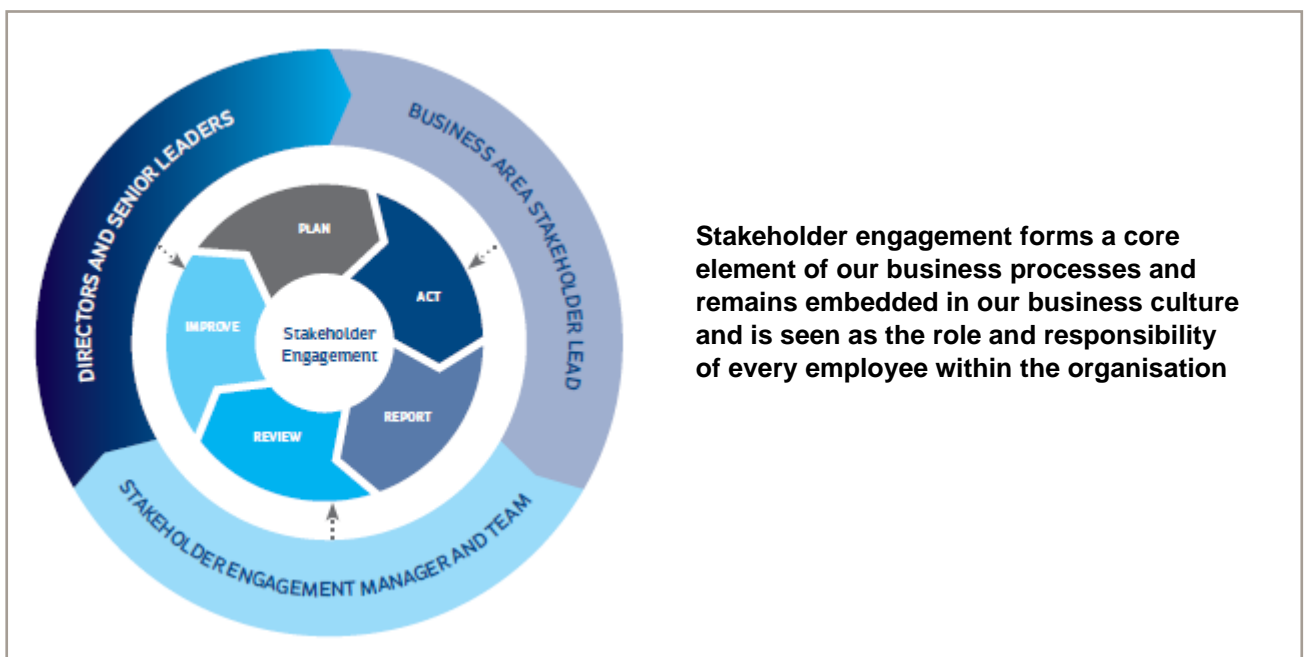
*"More insights in the process of how ESB Networks take on board stakeholders' feedback and address issues and decide whether to include/not to include suggestions in decisions would be welcomed by the Panel. Also, the DSO needs to better reflect how ongoing engagement*



*during the process of decision-making is taken on board and included in the outcomes of the decisions”.*

Through our public consultations we seek to actively inform, engage and hear from our customers and stakeholders on areas and activities across our business. During 2020, we have sought feedback through formal consultation processes on several key initiatives, including; our Innovation Strategy, Microgeneration Framework, MV Modular Substations and our Electrification of Heat and Transport strategy. We will continue to share our analysis of feedback received externally in response papers and reports. For example, this report responds to the feedback on our overall engagement strategy and plan during 2020.

The process used for sharing stakeholder engagement feedback across our business is described in our governance and control mechanisms, depicted below;



**Figure 1:** ESB Networks Stakeholder Engagement Governance and Control mechanism

An internal Stakeholder Engagement Steering Group made up of stakeholder leads from across the business meets regularly to discuss planned engagement activities, review stakeholder feedback and agree proposed improvements and adjustments based on recommendations. This group which is led by the Stakeholder Engagement Team and chaired by the Managing Director, provides overall direction to the stakeholder engagement process for ESB Networks.

## Theme 6: Pathways to engagement

ESB Networks recognises the importance of providing channels for our stakeholders that allows them initiate engagement with our business.

### Comment from Dingle Hub, January 2020

*“The plan emphasises the things that ESB Networks will do to engage (and correctly so) but it may also benefit from providing pathways for stakeholders to initiate engagements”.*

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic means that more than ever we need to maintain strong pathways for stakeholder engagement. Following the initial announcement of government restrictions in March 2020, we reached out to critical infrastructure stakeholder groups by providing dedicated points of contact in case of emergency. Having dedicated stakeholder leads across the business via our “Stakeholder Engagement Steering Group” has been key to helping ESB Networks liaise with its stakeholders during this uncertain time. More than ever we are dependent on virtual tools and new ways of connecting with our stakeholders in the absence of face to face interactions. We are currently undertaking the following initiatives to improve our pathways to engagement;

A Stakeholder Newsletter is being rolled out in Quarter 4 2020 to inform our stakeholders of our current business activities and key projects and to highlight upcoming engagement opportunities such as consultations, publications and events.

A companywide project is underway, and investment has been allocated to improve our website. We have made improvements to our dedicated Stakeholder and Public Engagement section of our website and we have added a new consultations/publications section in Q2 2020 in response to stakeholder feedback.

We are currently establishing an additional channel for open and transparent external perspectives for the development of our innovation strategy and initiatives. This Innovation Stakeholder Panel will be made up of external stakeholders from a broad range of key stakeholders with a vested interest in ESB Networks Innovation Strategy, projects and activities. It is intended as a platform for enabling open discussion and feedback and its objectives are to;

- ✓ **Guide** us on areas that are changing in industry, economy and broader society (perhaps emerging concerns) and that may influence our thinking and planning
- ✓ Enable us to **brief** key stakeholder groups on ESB Networks innovation projects and activities; for example, projects that fall under our three innovation roadmaps; Future Customer, Climate Action and Network Resilience.
- ✓ Create an additional channel for open and transparent **external perspectives** (and sounding board) for the development of our Innovation Strategy and associated roadmaps to ensure that the implementation of our innovation project portfolio provides enduring benefits to our customers and business.
- ✓ Facilitate **early engagement** on the selection, prioritisation and timeline planning of our innovation projects, by gaining a collaborative understanding of potential benefits and impacts of each proposed project to both our internal and external stakeholders

We are currently inviting stakeholder representatives to join our Innovation Stakeholder Panel from the following areas; renewable electricity sector, energy flexibility and storage bodies, academia/research, e-heat, e-transport, professional institutions, energy agencies/authorities, equipment/systems manufacturers, utility/TSO, industry and large energy users, electricity suppliers and industry consultants. We intend that this panel, chaired by ESB Networks will meet approximately twice a year with the initial kick off meeting planned for early December 2020.

## Theme 7: Engagement metrics & measuring performance

ESB Networks overall stakeholder engagement performance is currently measured on an annual basis by the independent Network Stakeholder Engagement Evaluation (NSEE) Panel established by the Commission for Energy Regulation (CRU). We receive an annual engagement performance score broken down into the categories of engagement strategy, implementation and impact/benefit.

ESB Networks welcomed the NSEE positive assessment of our engagement performance for 2019 with an improved overall score of 7.5 out of 10. This represented an increase of 10% in our performance from the previous year and consisted of an increase of 15% for our engagement strategy, an increase of 11% for implementation and a 7% increase for the impact /effectiveness of our engagement activity. This improved performance was reflected in comments from many our stakeholders.

### Comment from UCD Energy Institute, May 2020

*“We have seen significant improvement in our engagement with ESB Networks throughout 2019 and look forward to continued engagement into the future as we deliver the energy transition to a low carbon future”.*

### Comment from DRAI, May 2020

*“Acknowledge that throughout the year ESB Networks has strived to include representatives from across each of the key stakeholders’ groups”.*

ESB Networks understands the importance of having further meaningful mechanisms to measure the effectiveness of our engagement activities.

### Comment from Bord Gáis Energy, January 2020

*“Plan would benefit from more specific objectives and metrics for each of the work areas from which we can better measure success”.*

We will continue to apply both quantitative and qualitative engagement metrics to many specific engagement activities through targeted customer and stakeholder sentiment surveys and by gathering ratings, impressions and testimonials of our activities from our online and social media engagement platforms. For example;

- ✓ We measure the effectiveness of our engagement workshops and forums in providing a better understanding of the subjects being delivered.
- ✓ We continually measure customer and stakeholder sentiment relating to the National Smart Metering Programme.

- ✓ We measure the uptake and satisfaction of the use of our new online connections portal.

We will continue to develop measures of engagement performance to be inclusive of a broad range of stakeholders.

## Theme 8: Community Engagement

As we develop our network to meet the changing needs of customers we are actively engaging with our customers, communities and stakeholders to ensure that their needs and preferences inform our decision making and plans.

### Comment from NSEE panel, September 2020

*“ESB Networks could demonstrate better in the reports that they have mechanisms in place to embed the learnings around community engagement within the business and culture of the DSO”.*

Communities can play a vital role in the journey towards a low carbon future and can participate in community-led renewable energy projects supported by European and Irish policy initiatives, including the government’s Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) and the regulator’s Enduring Connection Policy (ECP). ESB Networks is fully committed to supporting and empowering communities in this journey and in proactively providing information, such as advice and guidance in relation to connecting community-led renewable energy projects to the electricity distribution network.

We are now putting in place a Community Energy Liaison Panel to act as the focal point of our engagement with communities around the country in relation to how ESB Networks can support the connection of community-led renewable energy projects to the electricity distribution network. We have enhanced our website with information relating to community led energy projects and have provided a dedicated pathway [communityenergy@esbnetworks.ie](mailto:communityenergy@esbnetworks.ie). We are also developing a community-led renewable energy projects guide to help support and explain the steps involved in connecting a community led renewable energy project to the electricity distribution network.

### Comment from Dingle Hub, January 2020

*“We believe that the innovative work that ESB Networks are leading in Dingle and the collaboration with us and other stakeholders on the Dingle 2030 project, are worth expanding on in your Plan, particularly in the context of novel community engagement methodologies (which are being tracked and evaluated) and outreach within the community”.*

Responding to this feedback we included a case study on the ESB Networks Dingle Project in our annual engagement report. The challenge of enabling a low-carbon Ireland powered by clean electricity requires extensive engagement and collaborative innovation with a broad range of stakeholders. This is the aim of our ‘Dingle Project Ambassador Programme’ whereby we are deploying a full suite of renewable energy technologies in Ambassadors’ homes/businesses, and they will work with us to help test the technologies so that we can not only understand the impact they will have on the electrical network, but also help us understand what we need to do to activate our energy citizens.

## 2. Shaping our Engagement in 2020

This section describes how we are acting on feedback received on our ‘Strategic Stakeholder Engagement Plan for 2020’, available [here](#).

### General Feedback

In general, our stakeholders welcomed the provision of an engagement plan for 2020, published in advance of the outset of the year and they agreed that the key areas of engagement identified in the plan were in alignment with their needs.

#### Comment from UCD, January 2020

*“The Strategic Stakeholder Framework and Plan 2020 are important documents which highlight the range of activities and stakeholders with which ESB Networks engage and help identify the priority areas. Ongoing engagement with stakeholders delivers benefits for all, and a strategic approach to this engagement helps to maximise the benefits”.*

#### Comment from Bord Gáis Energy, January 2020

*“The Plan 2020 as presented covers a range of areas of engagement that are key to not just stakeholders but are also significant to the continuation of a safe and reliable electricity service. The areas of change (decarbonisation of power generation) and innovation (a smarter and more digitally connected network) are balanced with a sustainable focus on “business-as-usual” activities that support customers, businesses and economic growth”.*

#### Comment from Chambers Ireland, January 2020

*“The ten specific areas of engagement outlined by ESB Networks provide broad opportunity for our members to engage. As part of their stakeholder Engagement Plan ESB Networks aim to support economic growth and connect business. As a business representative organisation, we welcome any strategy which will support this and enable the development of our economy”.*

#### Comment from Demand Response Aggregators of Ireland, January 2020

*“The DRAI also endorse the proactive and holistic approach to engagement set out in the Strategic Stakeholder Engagement Plan 2020”.*

ESB Networks welcomes these positive comments on its Stakeholder Plan for 2020. We are continuously evolving and shaping our engagement approach to drive ongoing improvements and to reflect stakeholder feedback as outlined in the following table;

Stakeholder feedback	Shaping our engagement
<p>“While balanced in nature, there remains the need to have more detailed and specific workstreams, clearly outlining the goals and expectations on successful outcomes. We would also advocate for the inclusion of agreed metrics to demonstrate the required delivery and engagement”. - BGE</p> <p>“At a high-level, our general commentary on the stakeholder engagement plan for 2020 is that it would benefit from more specific objectives and metrics for each of the work areas from which we can better measure success”. - IWEA</p>	<p>Our plan for 2020 sets out the focus and purpose of each of the key engagement areas. We have continued to enhance our engagement metrics and measurement tools during 2020. For example, during our innovation series of forums we have surveyed stakeholders before the engagement to tailor the exercise to their needs and then again at various stages throughout the engagement itself to gauge whether the engagement has successfully achieved its objective and has been beneficial to our stakeholders. We recognise the need to continuously assess and enhance engagement metrics going forward.</p>
<p>“The plan emphasises the things that ESB Networks will do to engage (and correctly so) but it may also benefit from providing pathways for stakeholders to initiate engagements”. - Dingle Hub</p>	<p>We have published our list of proposed consultation opportunities for the remainder of 2020 on our website. We also intend to publish a quarterly stakeholder newsletter which will highlight upcoming engagement opportunities. Future publications such as our Engagement Strategy and Plan for 2021 will include a full list of engagement opportunities such as planned meetings, events, consultations and publications. We will continue to strengthen our dedicated teams and points of contact across the business.</p>
<p>“Embed within the strategy that each employee in the organisation has a role and responsibility for engagement. Perhaps training can be considered to develop skills in this area”. – Dingle Hub</p>	<p>Our Stakeholder Steering Group made up of stakeholder leads from each area of our business work together to disseminate learnings and feedback from our stakeholder engagement activities. This is to ensure that engagement forms a core element of our business processes, remains embedded in our business culture and is seen as the role and responsibility of every employee within the organisation</p>
<p>“The language used is quite technical - depending on the specific stakeholder, it may help to introduce a more accessible plain English tone to effectively communicate the desire to engage”. - Dingle Hub”</p>	<p>We have made improvements to the way we report on our engagement activities following this feedback. Our recent report that we published in March 2020 on our engagement activities in 2019 received positive feedback in that it was well-presented and easy to understand. We will continue to use simple plain English to effectively communicate with our stakeholders.</p>

## Engagement Approach during 2020

The feedback from our stakeholders together with the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, shaped our engagement approach and activity during 2020 as described here;

Area of Engagement	Approach
<p><b>Price Review 5</b></p> <p>Objective: to ensure that our plans for the period 2021-2025 are informed by the needs and concerns of our customers and stakeholders</p>	<p>Extensive collaboration with a broad range of strategic stakeholders and customers has been undertaken throughout 2020 to work towards a Price Review determination that will reflect the needs of both ESB Networks and our stakeholders. A series of targeted workshops with stakeholders were conducted throughout Quarter 3, using a skype for business presentation format with menti.com used to capture stakeholder feedback. We welcome the input that our stakeholders have contributed and look forward to the final Price Review Determination from the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) due to be published before end of 2020.</p>
<p><b>Smart Metering</b></p> <p>Objective: to ensure that our customers and stakeholders are fully aware of the national meter replacement programme and that their views are reflected in our plans</p>	<p>In response to COVID-19 we implemented additional measures to ensure the health and safety of customers, staff and contractors during the meter replacement process. At the end of March 2020, the meter replacement programme was suspended temporarily due to government working restrictions. Outdoor meter replacement resumed in late May and indoor replacement resumed in September 2020.</p> <p>The NSMP engagement plan adjusted accordingly with face-to-face campaigns currently suspended. All other engagement plans proceeded as planned, including the Programme’s industry partners working group meetings, written briefings were provided to all elected representatives in the rollout areas, as well as quarterly customer satisfaction and sentiment surveys by Red C.</p> <p>Easily accessible online information was enhanced with the addition of Frequently Asked Questions and videos uploaded onto the website giving an overview of the programme, its importance for the Climate Action Plan and information on how to read a smart meter.</p> <p>The NSMP communications campaign was rolled out on local radio, press and online channels in July and September 2020. According to research conducted by Red C, awareness of smart meters in the total population increased from 65% in September 2019 to 75% in September 2020. A rise of 10% due to engagement activity so far this year.</p>

Area of Engagement	Approach
<p><b>Safety and the environment</b></p> <p>Objective: to ensure the safety of all who interact with our network and care for the environment</p>	<p>A very positive response has been received in 2020 from partnerships formed with the local authorities, Fire Service, An Garda Síochána, the Irish Farmers Journal, Construction Industry Federation Industry and the Health and Safety Authority on electricity safety and the environment.</p> <p>This has been very important considering many stakeholder engagement opportunities could not proceed as originally planned e.g. events such as the National Ploughing Championships, CIF Safety Week conference. However, ESB Networks continues to deliver engaging safety content through virtual meetings, social media channels (weekly posts dedicated to safety messaging), tv and radio safety campaigns.</p> <p>On the environment, proactive engagement has continued with relevant authorities on reporting, assessing and closing environmental incidents and we continue to increase the information available to the public on our website as environmental assessments are completed.</p>
<p><b>Customer Experience</b></p> <p>Objective: Ensure that the needs of our customers are taken on board and satisfied in their interactions with our business</p>	<p>Following extensive customer research and feedback a new connections online process was launched in February 2020. This new process means customers can now apply for a new connection on our website (except for Generator Connections and Unmetered Supply). In addition to the online application, domestic and small commercial customers can now track the progress of their application from Application to Service Live and will be able to see a 60-day countdown timer when they log in and view their application. The countdown timer will give them an estimated time for connection in line with our Customer Charter targets. During 2020 there has been a 50% uptake of this new process and a targeted campaign is in progress to drive usage up further into 2021 and beyond.</p> <p>ESB Networks launched a new campaign, “Keeping the Nation Humming in June 2020”. The purpose of the campaign was to improve understanding of the role of ESB Networks and to gain acceptance from our customers for planned outages that will happen as a result of some key work programmes we need to complete. These outages happen all the time but as many people are working from home due to COVID-19 restrictions, these outages are now more sensitive than ever before.</p> <p>The campaign includes a 30 second TV ad, four 30 second Radio ads, a full suite of Digital Display, Search and Social Media ads along with Digital Audio ads and a media partnership.</p>



Area of Engagement	Approach
	<p>Along with raising awareness of the role of ESB Networks the ads explain why we incur planned outages (in the relevant areas), build Smart Metering awareness (in the relevant areas) and build Safety Messaging awareness.</p> <p>The external campaign is being supported by stakeholder communications and a public affairs campaign.</p>
<p><b>Connecting Renewables</b></p> <p>Objective: Provide customers and stakeholders with a voice in the connection and hosting of renewable energy sources on our network. Working supportively and collaboratively together, we can achieve the national targets for decarbonisation of the electricity system</p>	<p>Through extensive engagement and collaboration with the TSO (EirGrid) and the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU), ESB Networks met the challenging timelines of issuing 95 connection offers totalling 800MWs over an 18-month period between Dec18 and May20. Many improvements have been implemented into the ECP-2 process in response to stakeholder feedback. For instance, the importance of ESB Networks engaging early with project developers is now recognised through the provision of connection method meetings to ensure that projects have a higher likelihood of moving forward successfully.</p> <p>We are now also publishing more detailed network information (e.g. network capacity heat maps) to allow projects where possible the opportunity to optimize their Maximum Export Capacity, potentially increasing their viability. Stakeholder webinars were hosted in July 2020 specifically on how to utilise these heat maps and to provide early information and clarification regarding the ruleset for the ECP-2 process.</p> <p>Engagement on the Lean Connections Project has been welcomed by our stakeholders in Quarter 3 2020, with further engagement planned for Q4 2020, to get stakeholder input on the changes we are proposing and implementing as the Lean Connections Project progresses.</p>
<p><b>Innovation</b></p> <p>Objective: Involve and collaborate with our customers and stakeholders on our innovation strategy to enable a low-carbon future.</p>	<p>In March 2020, we published for public consultation our 'Innovation for the Network of the Future', which details the current innovation activities and projects ongoing in ESB Networks. This addressed requests from stakeholders to provide more detailed information regarding how a project is to be delivered and how stakeholders can engage with the process,</p> <p>This document sets out our Innovation strategy and framework, innovation process, project portfolio and roadmaps, collaboration and engagement dissemination process and the benefits and learnings from stakeholder feedback. Also published was a list of our proposed pipeline projects i.e. a list of our projects that are currently in ESB Networks' pipeline of possible future innovation projects.</p>

Area of Engagement	Approach
	<p>In Spring 2020, we held our Innovation Forum as a webinar series in response to COVID-19 restrictions. These webinars covered topics including our Dingle Project, our Netflix Project and our Innovation Project Identification &amp; Evaluation Process.</p> <p>When planning for our Autumn 2020 Innovation webinar series, to best serve our stakeholders and to ensure that we were hosting webinars on topics that were of interest to them, we issued a survey providing 11 topic options, allowing stakeholders to vote on their preferences.</p> <p>The final Autumn Webinar Series reflected the topics chosen by our stakeholders including our innovation pipeline projects, the electrification of transport, our SOGNO Project, our Active System Management Project and our consultation on the standard modules for electric vehicle charging hubs.</p> <p>Throughout the webinar series we sought feedback from our stakeholders which we have used to inform our innovation projects and activities. The feedback shared cited that webinars are the preferred choice of dissemination and the innovation webinar series has successfully increased stakeholders’ awareness and understanding of ESB Networks Innovation activities.</p> <p>At our final presentation of the Autumn series, 80% of respondents confirmed that their awareness and understanding had increased over the last 12 months.</p>
<p><b>Enabling Electrification</b></p> <p>Objective: To engage with customers and stakeholders in enabling the electrification of heat and transport. Using clean electricity to reduce carbon emissions is key to delivery of our national climate action plan.</p>	<p>In response to feedback and in collaboration with our stakeholders we have developed an Electrification Strategy which sets out our vision and approach to facilitating the electrification of heat and transport. Our stakeholders asked us to consider introducing a step beyond informing and increasing awareness on electrification, and so through a public consultation process in October 2020, we are seeking stakeholder feedback on this draft strategy.</p> <p>To view the consultation document, please click <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p>The consultation period will close on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020 with a further online stakeholder event planned for 6<sup>th</sup> November to further support engagement on the development of the strategy.</p>

## Conclusion and future engagement

ESB Networks appreciates the importance of stakeholder feedback in shaping our engagement strategy and plans. Such feedback has informed our evolving approach to engagement in 2020.

We will continue to work with our stakeholders to address key themes such as the importance of early engagement, addressing feedback, providing pathways for engagement and measuring the impact of our engagement activities.

We will continue to look for new and innovative ways to engage with our stakeholders to ensure continuous stakeholder engagement improvement into the future.

**ESB Networks' strategy for 2020-2030** as framed by the Climate Action Plan will be published for consultation in November 2020. This business strategy is driven by our central role in leading the transition to a secure and affordable low-carbon future, using clean electricity to drive carbon in the form of fossil fuels - out of heat, transport and the economy. This 2030 strategy builds on ESB Networks' legacy of performance for customers, for the economy and for society. It recognises that Climate Action is one of the most important challenges of our generation and identifies the critically important and central role of ESB Networks to enable the transition to low carbon.

Following this consultation process we will be further engaging with our stakeholders on our **Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Plan 2021**. This document will outline our proposed key areas of engagement activity for 2021 as informed by our business strategy and the needs of our stakeholders determined through a process of feedback and ongoing collaboration. We propose to publish this document early in 2021 to include a list and timing of the proposed engagement events, consultations, and publications proposed for the year ahead.

If you would like to contact ESB Networks in relation to any aspect of this report or our engagement with you, please contact us at [stakeholder@esbnetworks.ie](mailto:stakeholder@esbnetworks.ie)