ESB NETWORKS

Winter 2025 Grid Resilience Plan

UPDATE - October 2025

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In the immediate aftermath of Storm Éowyn, ESB Networks published the Enhanced Winter 2025 Grid Resilience Plan. As outlined in this plan, enhancing the durability of our network given both the scale and the ferocity of Storm Éowyn will be a multi-year programme. The objective of this plan is to enhance the resilience of the electricity network in the most vulnerable locations for the upcoming winter 2025-2026. Our plan focused on those counties that have been worst affected by recent storms namely Cavan, Clare, Donegal, Galway, Leitrim, Longford, Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo and Westmeath. In total, 112 electricity outlets have been identified for work across these 10 counties.

A summary of the key updates across each of the areas that were set out in the plan is captured below.

Network Inspection

Post-storm inspections of the transmission and 38kV networks were completed by helicopter patrols covering 12,200km of network. Most priority hazards have been addressed, with remaining issues scheduled for clearance. Medium voltage network inspections are materially complete, with 10,500km of network inspected, with the clearance of identified defects well underway. The remaining 300km of network inspection will be completed by the end of October 2025, which will fully complete the total planned km of network as set out in the plan. This is in addition to the regular network inspection and overhead line construction programmes that are carried out annually across the country.

Emergency Timber Cutters

The clearance of hedgerow timber and vegetation that is impacting the network in the worst affected areas has been prioritised as a key action in the winter plan. This work supplements our normal annual timber clearing programmes and will focus on the removal of diseased and weakened trees in falling distance of the electrical network. The importance of this work is confirmed by the review of Storm Éowyn, which identified falling timber as the primary cause of approximately 50% of faults during this storm.

Since publication of ESB Networks' Winter Plan in April 2025, we completed a formal tendering exercise for additional emergency timber cutters and secured a delivery partner for this additional timber cutting programme. The successful timber cutting contractor is now mobilised, with timber cutting underway in Galway and Westmeath. Pre-work planning, surveying and landowner engagement is also active in counties of Cavan, Clare, Leitrim, Longford, Mayo, Roscommon and Sligo. This work is set to commence in the coming weeks.

In addition to these emergency timber cutters, a further number of additional timber cutting resources were secured and augmented to our existing domestic based contractors. In total, there are over 50 additional timber cutters temporarily supplementing our regular programmes that are ongoing across the country.

Forestry Corridor Progress

Following our review of Storm Éowyn, ESB Networks has published the report which describes the significant work involved in clearing forestry that had fallen on top of electricity network in Storm Éowyn, delaying the electrical network repair. 50 harvesters worked a combined total of over 550 workdays to clear the faults caused by forestry.

As part of this Winter Plan, sections of the network in ten counties hardest hit by recent storms were prioritised for survey and approximately 710km of forestry corridors were identified. Following further analysis, 337km of forestry corridors in the worst affected areas were surveyed using drone technology, with analysis and categorisation of urgency carried out thereafter. Certain critical forestry corridors for Medium Voltage and 38 kV electric lines have been prioritised for cutting based on interference and access levels.

In order to cut these priority forestry corridors, the agreement of the relevant landowners is required. ESB Networks has mobilised a team to identify and engage with the forestry owners. In this regard, landowner identification is at a well-advanced stage and landowner engagement with forestry landowners (including Coillte, private landowners, corporate bodies, and forestry representative groups) is ongoing. While individual landowner responses are positive, agreements are taking time.

Since commencement during the summer, ESB Networks has engaged with landowners of over 700 forestry sites. ESB Networks plans to cut all high priority sites where agreement has been obtained over the coming months, bearing in mind this remains a voluntary process of engagement with landowners.

Harvesting services have been procured following a tendering exercise and are now mobilised, with operations underway. The first harvester was mobilised in July, with a second harvester mobilised in September. Sufficient harvesting capacity has been secured to address the high priority sites, where consent is obtained.

25% of the forestry corridors are owned by Coillte, and there is ongoing engagement between ESB Networks and Coillte to address the high priority sites over the winter period.

ESB Networks continues to work closely with Government on the legal framework to put the requirement for forestry corridors on a statutory footing. The Heads of Bill for this legislation has been approved and drafting of legislation is underway.

Storm Materials

Replenishment of storm materials is progressing well. After Storm Éowyn, we proposed to double the stockholding of a number of material items for retention in our storm-dedicated stores. At the beginning of October 2025, we had achieved 90% of our target to replenish to these increased levels. A small number of items were also retired in favour of consolidating our stockholding. Procurement of the remaining materials is ongoing.

When required, these storm materials may be used over the coming winter months.

Strengthening Relationships for Mutual Aid during Storms

ESB Networks is leading a working group under E.DSO (European Distribution System Operators) comprising of 12 utilities from across the 37 member DSOs who are working together to formalise mutual aid arrangements with European utilities.

Technical Pilots

A pilot project for pole trussing was completed in June 2025 in Virginia, Co. Cavan, with post-implementation analysis underway. A number of additional pilots will be completed over the coming months including a pilot to assess the use of both covered conductor and composite cross-arms. Following previously completed technical pilots, ESB Networks is now commencing with the rollout of composite poles across the country.

By introducing these technical advancements, the overhead network infrastructure will be further strengthened, which will be beneficial during future severe weather events.

International Review of Utilities

As described in the Winter 2025 Grid Resilience Plan, ESB Networks detailed our plans to engage with other utilities to further explore the measures being used across Europe, and wider, to prepare for future weather / storm events. The review has now commenced. We expect to conclude this in early 2026.

Ongoing Growth of Resources

In addition to the measures called out in the Winter Plan, ESB Networks continues to focus on growing our resources for our regular programmes of work.

ESB Networks has continued to expand its workforce, hiring over 160 Network Technicians and increasing the annual apprentice intake by 50% in 2025. Timber cutting and overhead line contractor capacity continues to grow, and in collaboration with government and training bodies, new apprenticeship programmes and additional contractors from beyond the European Economic Area, who have been secured via work permits, are helping build long-term national capacity in critical infrastructure skills.

Summary

In response to the widespread impact of Storm Éowyn, ESB Networks developed the Enhanced Winter 2025 Grid Resilience Plan to strengthen the electricity network in Ireland's most vulnerable regions. As outlined above, increasing the resilience of the network is a multi-year programme, and given the size and scale of the overhead electrical network in Ireland severe weather events will continue to impact the network. ESB Networks, however, remains committed to maintaining a strong, more storm-resilient electrical network for communities across Ireland.

Delivering this emergency programme has required extensive planning, the establishment of new dedicated teams, and securing both financial and regulatory approvals. Since its publication, major progress has been made across key areas including aerial and ground-based network inspections, emergency timber and vegetation clearance, and the surveying and cutting of critical forestry corridors. Over 700 forestry sites have been engaged with landowners, and harvesting operations are now underway. Storm material stocks have been replenished to ensure rapid response capability, and ESB Networks is leading efforts to formalise mutual aid agreements with European utilities. Technical pilots and an international review of resilience strategies are also underway. This work will continue through the winter and beyond, as many of the programmes, particularly the forestry corridor initiatives, are multi-year efforts.

ESB Networks would like to acknowledge the significant cooperation and engagement from landowners and the forestry industry in our efforts to ensure the network that provides electricity to homes, farms, and local communities in these areas is more resilient for winter 2025-2026.

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