



NETWORKS

# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY AND PLAN 2021

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# CONTENTS

<b>01</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>02</b>	<b>STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>03</b>	<b>HOW STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK IS SHAPING OUR ENGAGEMENT</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>04</b>	<b>ESB NETWORKS BUSINESS STRATEGY</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>05</b>	<b>STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY AND PLAN FOR 2021</b>	<b>16</b>
	Resilience, Growth and Active System Management	18
	Innovation	20
	Electrification of Heat and Transport	22
	Smart Metering	24
	Customer Experience	26
	Connecting Renewables	28
	Safety	30
	The Environment	31
<b>06</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>32</b>
	<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>34</b>
	Table 1 Consultations	35
	Table 2 Publications	37
	Table 3 Pathways to engagement	39

# 01. INTRODUCTION

## OUR ROLE

**ESB Networks has a key role to play in enabling the transition to a low-carbon society in Ireland. Our network 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 in the form of fossil fuels 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.



### PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The purpose of this document is to set out our proposed stakeholder engagement strategy and plans for 2021. It has been developed taking on board valuable feedback and recommendations received from our customers and stakeholders throughout 2020.

It outlines our proposed key areas of engagement for 2021, which will allow greater stakeholder collaboration to support our role in ensuring a safe, reliable, secure network whilst enabling the transition to a low carbon future.

This document includes a listing of our engagements including consultations, publications and pathways to engagement (ESB Networks hosted stakeholder meetings and events) for 2021.

These lists will also be published on our website as live documents allowing us to respond to and inform our stakeholders of any changes that may be required throughout the year. We are publishing this document for consultation to allow our stakeholders further opportunity to shape and enhance our engagement strategy and plans throughout 2021 and beyond.

### Paddy Hayes

Managing Director, ESB Networks



# 02. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

ESB Networks' "Strategic Stakeholder Engagement Framework", sets out our enduring engagement strategy to enable an open and ongoing dialogue with all our stakeholders. The framework identifies our stakeholders and the principles that guide our engagement, together with our proposed engagement methodology and our governance and control processes. The following section summarises the key elements of this framework which continues to be refined in line with ongoing stakeholder feedback and recommendations for continuous improvement.

Our stakeholders are the individuals, groups of individuals, communities and organisations that affect, or could be affected by our activities products or services and associated performance. Stakeholder engagement is the process whereby we actively engage with our customers and stakeholders with a clear purpose and to achieve agreed outcomes.

Given our central role in the electricity sector, providing an electricity connection to over 2.3 million customers and with interactions with a broad range of communities, organisations, representative bodies and industry groups, our engagement spans a wide range of customer types and stakeholders.



ESB Networks Stakeholders

## OUR APPROACH

We recognise that the engagement approach needs to be tailored to the different needs of our stakeholder groups. Our principles and methodology of engagement are guided by the AA1000 stakeholder engagement standard<sup>1</sup>, which is used by many leading organisations and network operators. The principles below underpin all our activities when engaging with our customers and stakeholders.

Different levels of stakeholder engagement are appropriate, depending on the purpose, materiality, desired outcome, time frame resources, and level of interest.

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 will warrant greater levels of engagement. Where the

## PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

INCLUSIVITY	MATERIALITY	RESPONSIVENESS	IMPACT
Give people a say in the issues that impact them	Identify and be clear about the issues that matter	Act transparently on material issues	Engagement should positively impact customers, stakeholders and the business
We will engage widely with our customers and stakeholders	We will focus on the most relevant and significant issues that affect our customers, stakeholders and business	We will communicate and be transparent on the outcomes of the engagement process	We will monitor, measure and be accountable for the impact of our engagement actively

We use a structured and systematic approach to engaging with our customers and stakeholders. This involves a cycle of planning, action, reporting, review and improvement.

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.

<sup>1</sup> AA1000 Stakeholder engagement Standard (2015) and AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Principles (2018) available at [www.accountability.org/standards/](http://www.accountability.org/standards/)



## ENGAGEMENT METHODOLOGY

<b>PLAN</b>	Planning is essential for effective stakeholder engagement. During the planning phase, we identify the purpose of engagement; which stakeholders need to be engaged; the timeline for engagement; what level of engagement is most appropriate; and the resources that are required to achieve success.
<b>ACT</b>	This involves implementing the planned engagement activities. Briefing stakeholders in advance sets the context and improves the quality of engagement. Engagement is conducted according to agreed ground rules and outputs are documented. Following engagement, an action plan is developed that sets out how we will respond to the outputs of the engagement. Finally, we communicate the engagement outputs and action plan with stakeholders.
<b>REPORT</b>	Reporting on stakeholder concerns and comments is important for effective engagement. Through this process, stakeholder concerns are better understood and acted upon. Reporting can be done both formally through reports and informally through regular updates and meetings. We address the actions outlined in the action plan and inform stakeholders of the outcome.
<b>REVIEW</b>	We seek to continuously improve our stakeholder engagement processes and outcomes by evaluating what was successful and what could be improved. This can be determined through feedback from stakeholders and through other performance indicators.
<b>IMPROVE</b>	By reviewing the feedback from our customers and stakeholders, we can ensure that the lessons learned are incorporated into subsequent engagement plans.

## LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

	INFORM	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE
Characteristics	One-way engagement	Two-way engagement	Joint decision-making
Purpose	Provide information	Obtain feedback	Identify preferred solutions
Promise	Keep you informed	Listen and acknowledge	Incorporate recommendations
Tools	Documentation and media	Conferences, meetings and surveys	Workshops, seminars and surgeries



**OUR GOVERNANCE AND CONTROL**

We recognise that effective stakeholder engagement is essential for the successful management of our business. As a strategic priority, it is led by the Directors and the senior leadership team and is seen as a vital activity at every level of the organisation.

The Stakeholder Engagement Team meets regularly with the Stakeholder Leads across the business to develop engagement plans and ensure implementation using appropriate methods and levels of engagement. They also work together to monitor outcomes, measure performance, provide feedback to customers and stakeholders, and seek opportunities to improve the overall engagement process.

**MANAGING OUR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

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.

Stakeholder engagement forms a core element of our business processes and remains embedded in our business culture and is seen as the role and responsibility of every employee within the organisation.

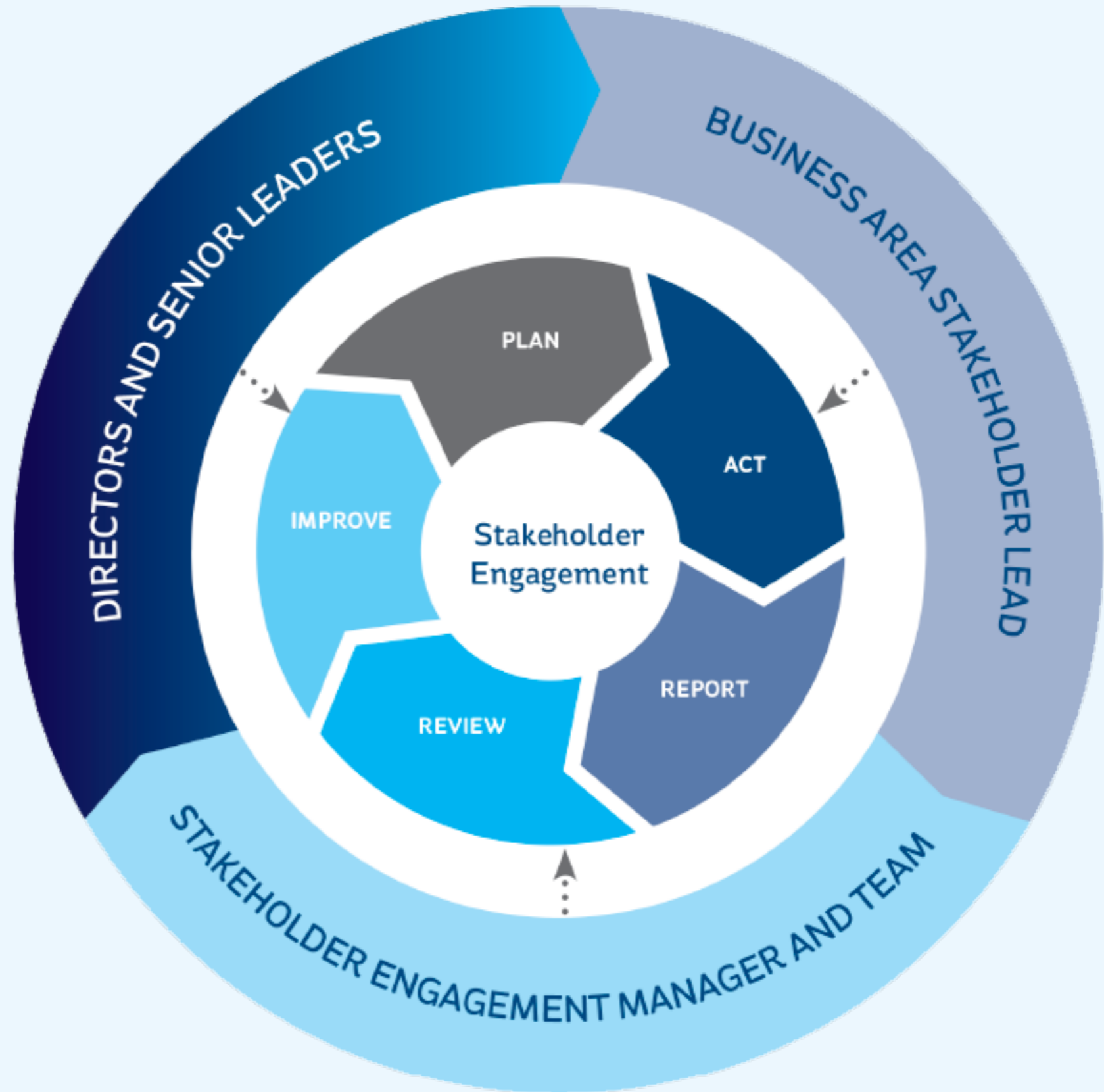


Figure 1: ESB Networks Stakeholder Engagement Governance and Control mechanism

# 03. HOW STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK IS SHAPING OUR ENGAGEMENT

**We value the feedback we have received to date, which is enabling us to continually refine our engagement approach for the benefit of our stakeholders. Good engagement benefits our customers, stakeholders, the wider community and our business.**

When we engage with each other in a genuine two-way conversation, we can learn from each other, enabling us to make better decisions and work towards mutually beneficial outcomes. Ultimately, better engagement builds stronger relationships and gives us greater opportunities to achieve our business objectives. The earlier we engage with each other, the more likely these benefits will be realised.

For our customers and stakeholders, engagement provides opportunities to contribute to projects and programmes, have their issues heard and inform the decision-making process. It gives these groups better understanding of our priorities, increased ownership of outcomes and greater capacity to engage in how energy will be used in the future.

For ESB Networks, engagement provides insights by understanding changing priorities, tapping into specialist or local knowledge and gives us the opportunity to 'road-test' proposals or initiatives with stakeholders. It helps us identify emerging issues and risks and is central to us meeting our statutory obligations and better meeting customer needs.

During 2020 we consulted, listened and learned from our Stakeholders. We published a report '**How Stakeholder Feedback is Shaping our Engagement**' to describe how this stakeholder feedback is shaping our approach to our engagement strategy, plans and activities. It describes how ESB Networks is interpreting stakeholders' needs and our proposed approach to ensure continuous improvement of our engagement going forward.

In this report we describe stakeholder feedback under several key themes such as: the importance of early engagement; the grid connection offer process; working with the TSO (EirGrid); how we address our feedback, pathways to engagement, engagement metrics & measuring performance; and community engagement.

For each theme we outline the key recommendations and how they are informing our approach to stakeholder engagement for 2020 and beyond.

ESB Networks very much appreciates our stakeholders ongoing support and feedback and we will continue to look for new and innovative ways to engage with our stakeholders to ensure strong collaboration on our initiatives and activities throughout the year.





# 04. ESB NETWORKS BUSINESS STRATEGY

## BACKGROUND

The energy industry is experiencing significant transformation, driven by climate change and decarbonisation considerations set down in various European and national policies, directives and legislation. In 2019, the Irish government laid out in the Climate Action Plan, Ireland's strategy to meet its 2030 climate and energy targets.

Building on the sustained commitment made to decarbonising electricity generation in Ireland over the past two decades, the Climate Action Plan, sets a target of 70% renewable electricity, and the decarbonisation of the heat and transport sectors through the electrification of heat and transport by 2030. A key part of the Clean Energy Package and the Climate Action Plan is the empowerment of customers, both residential and business, to become participants as active players in the energy transition.

Our 2030 strategy builds on 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. It identifies the critically important and central role of ESB Networks to enable the transition to low carbon. It anticipates some of the major changes that will impact Networks over the next ten years and beyond.

## PRICE REVIEW 5 (PR5) 2021-2025

The PR5 Determination, published at the close of 2020, has provided ESB Networks with a clear mandate from the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities (CRU), to deliver a business plan which was designed, with our customers and stakeholders, to meet the needs of a transforming and developing Irish society over the coming years.

Our regulatory mandate is critical to ESB Networks' ability to deliver for customers. The PR5 determination focusses on supporting those activities which have the greatest impact on customers, and which are most critical to enable a low carbon future in Ireland, including the electrification of heat and transport, and achieving our 70% renewables target by 2030. This includes:

- > Beginning to deliver localised capacity upgrades, to enable Irish households and businesses begin to adopt electric heating, vehicles and microgeneration
- > Rolling out the National Smart Metering programme nationwide, so that Irish homes and businesses are

empowered to take greater control of when, and how much, electricity they use

- > Rolling out transformative new operational control system capabilities to enable customers (renewables, demand, communities, storage) to participate in a low carbon electricity system, locally and in the Single Electricity Market (SEM)
- > Delivering more capacity and asset replacement across the transmission and distribution systems, to ensure that the backbone of our system is secure and resilience
- > Connecting an ever-accelerating pipeline of renewable generation.

As we enter into this new price review period 2021-2025, we would like to thank our customers and stakeholders for their active and open participation in the PR5 process. The actions and the voices of our stakeholders and our customers provided ESB Networks with the clarity and evidence needed to build a transformative and effective PR5 business plan. Those same customer and stakeholder voices provided the CRU with the assurance it needed with regard to customers values and expectations, as it arrived at its PR5 determination.





# 05. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY AND PLAN FOR 2021

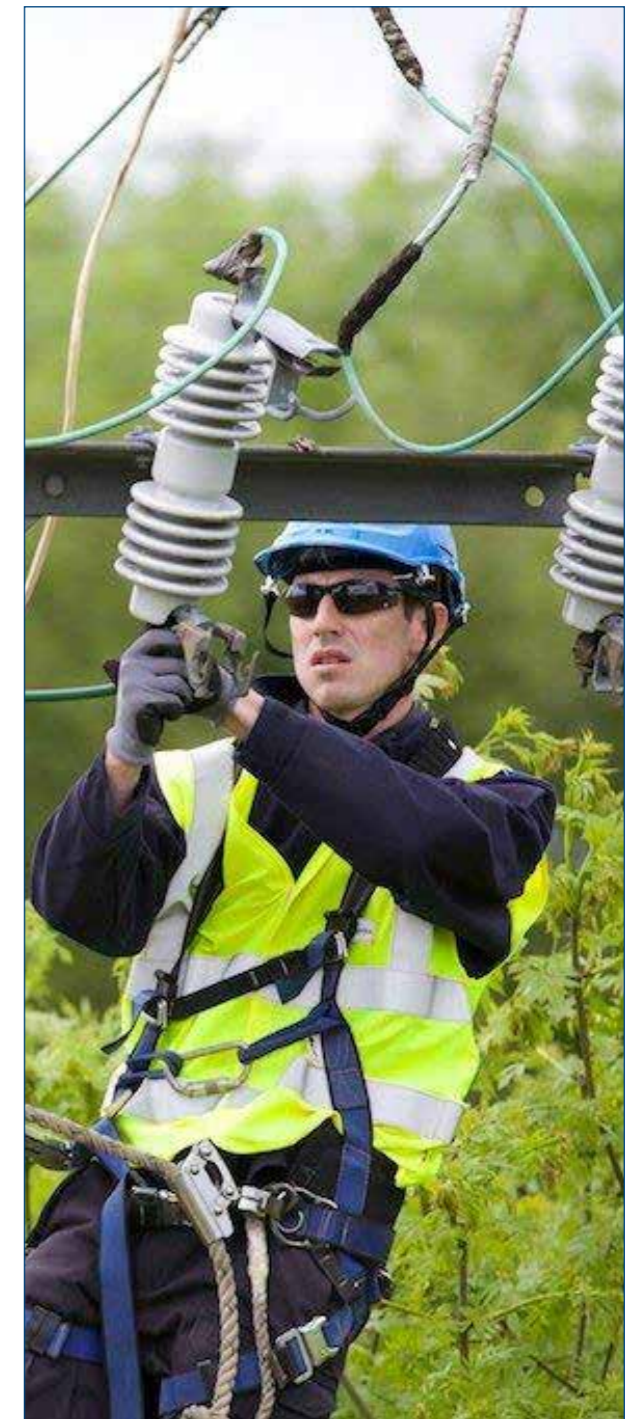
Our 'Strategic Stakeholder Engagement Framework' sets out the key areas for our stakeholder engagement activities which are aligned with our 2020-2030 Strategy and our pivotal role in securing a low-carbon society in Ireland. These areas of engagement continue to be further refined through stakeholder consultation and feedback to ensure they meet all our business, regulatory, stakeholder and customer needs in an ever-changing industry landscape.

They are built on our commitments to our customers and stakeholders to;

- > Continue to provide a safe, reliable and affordable electricity service to all customers, including fuel-poor and vulnerable customers
- > Ensure that the customer remains central to our business and continuing to improve the overall customer experience
- > Ensure that engagement on 'business-as-usual' activities remains a key part of our overall stakeholder engagement process
- > Continue to maintain and develop the electricity network in order to ensure that it is robust, resilient and capable of dealing with increasingly difficult weather conditions in the face of climate change
- > Support the connection of increased amounts of low carbon energy generation, such as wind and solar energy and localised domestic and community-based energy schemes, to address the need to reduce carbon emissions and meet national targets
- > Continue to ensure that the electricity network supports economic growth, including the connection of new homes, businesses and large energy users
- > Plan and develop a smarter and more digitally connected network to enable new modes of network operation which are needed to support new energy usage patterns essential to a low-carbon society, such as increased use of electric vehicles, electrification of heating and customer participation in energy markets

## FOCUS OF ENGAGEMENT FOR 2021

While the key areas of engagement as set out in our 'Strategic Stakeholder Engagement Framework' are enduring, the following provides an overview of some of the key planned engagement initiatives for 2021.





# RESILIENCE, GROWTH AND ACTIVE SYSTEM MANAGEMENT



**Our Network is essential long-term infrastructure, developed over many years to meet the changing needs of Ireland's electricity customers. As electrification develops, the quality, condition and performance of the network will become increasingly important.**

To ensure the network remains reliable and secure we will continue to invest in its maintenance and upkeep and take advantage of the developments in digital technologies to collect information on our assets (drones, intelligent measurement devices, mobile workforce), monitor the network in real time, and enable optimisation of the network through advances in the use of data analytics and machine intelligence. We will develop our network so that it is secure, reliable, flexible and resilient.

ESB Networks has recently commenced the Active System Management (ASM) project, to fundamentally and innovatively transform how we manage and operate the electricity distribution system. By actively managing demand and generation, ESB Networks will enable distributed generation, demand, communities and storage to actively participate in a low carbon electricity system, within an overall market framework. Given its transformational role, both within and outside of our organisation, it will involve extensive collaboration with stakeholders over the coming years. This collaboration will focus on how we pilot and

introduce new solutions in the short to medium term, and how these grow into sustainable, integrated solutions over the medium to long term.

This initiative has been established as a dedicated multi-year project. It will require quite extensive, dedicated consultation with customers, industry, and technology/supply chain stakeholders.

**Objective:** Active system management solutions are premised on interaction between system operation and system users. Put simply, without customers actively involved and participating in how we deliver this project, active system management cannot become a reality. In 2021, the objective of customer and stakeholder consultation and communications will be on:

- > Building broad and deep awareness of the project, its time-lines objectives, and opportunities to participate
- > Building customer and stakeholder consultation channels
- > Ensuring that customers and stakeholders have a voice in the project at high level design and project development activities from the outset

**Action:** We will need to consult and involve customers right across our overall customer and stakeholder base, from communities, small customers and societal interest representatives, to enterprise, renewables, energy industry,

and technology stakeholders. Our stakeholders will need to have foresight of the opportunities and channels to get involved, and the timing and issues we will be consulting on in 2021. As such, our first step in 2021 will be to develop a consultation approach which involves all of those who need to be involved, from the outset, in the right ways, to ensure that they can have a meaningful voice in planning and decision making processes.

Over the coming years, as we sequentially introduce new active management products and services for customers to participate, piloting will be central to the roll out of active system management. In 2021, we plan to commence consulting on pilot approaches (location, means of recruiting participants, technical requirements to participate, timing etc) which create the greatest opportunity and deliver the greatest value for customers and for the Irish electricity system.

Finally, we will rely on technology providers' and energy supply and management companies' decisions and activities, for customers to be able to participate in active system management early and effectively. As such, in 2021 we plan to develop channels for consulting and communicating with vendors, OEMs, those who deliver charging, heating and energy management solutions, installers, and technology developers, so they are in a position to make decision and take actions which support customers' ability

to participate in active system management in the future. Action: In 2021 we will:

- > Develop and publish a consultation and communications road-map that provides stakeholders across customers and society, industry and technology sectors with the information needed to participate in our consultation activities.
- > Consult on a number of key high-level design and development issues in 2021, to ensure that effective and accessible proposals are developed, based on a strong customer and stakeholder voice in setting the direction of the active system management project.
- > Establish initial pilot-participant journeys, addressing key issues such the identification of locations, participant recruitment channels, informational requirements, technical requirements, and time-lines.
- > Establish evidence & research-based approaches to accounting for customer and stakeholder preferences in project design and delivery decisions.

**Measure:** We will continue to measure and gauge the effectiveness of our actions throughout 2021 using a series of round table consultative meetings, public consultations and customer research activities (including surveys and focus groups).



# INNOVATION



**Stakeholder collaboration and engagement are essential parts of our Innovation Strategy and take place at each step of our innovation process. ESB Networks collaborates with a wide range of stakeholders including academic institutions, government entities and organisations, industry trade associations, electricity suppliers and generators, as well as new energy actors such as Demand Side Units (DSUs) and battery storage providers.**

**Objective:** We acknowledge that the challenges posed by the transition to a low carbon economy are substantial and a collaborative approach to addressing these challenges is essential. We believe we have a role to support our external partners' research and innovation activities that are likely to make contributions to Ireland's targets for decarbonisation. Furthermore, we acknowledge that enabling the connection of greater levels of renewables, electrification of heat and transport and active energy citizens can only be achieved by collaborating and engaging with our external partners, stakeholders, customers and communities.

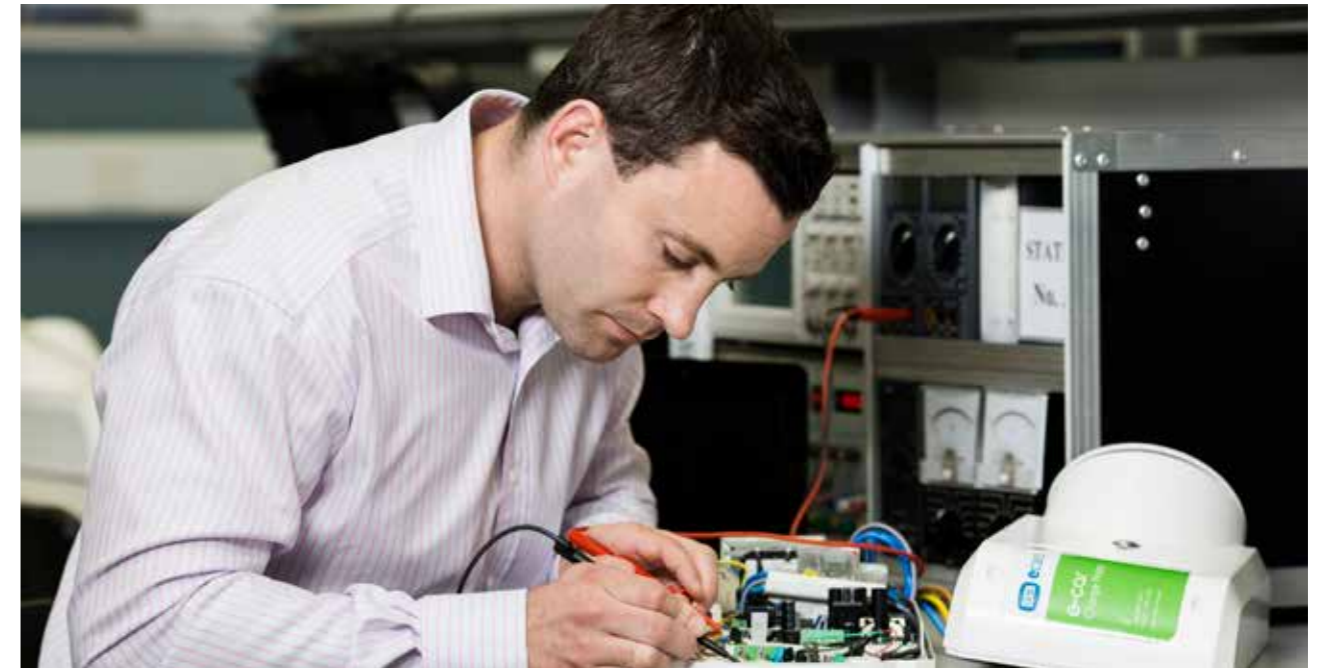
**Action:** We will continue to engage with our stakeholders via several channels. These include a public industry consultation on our overall innovation strategy, projects and activities in Q1 2021, further annual public consultations

on our innovation activities, Spring & Autumn Innovation Forums and a range of targeted engagements with industry stakeholders.

Stakeholder feedback has recommended the ability for stakeholders and customers to apply for representation on external innovation stakeholder advisory groups. As a result, we established an Innovation Stakeholder Panel to provide a platform to enable open discussion and feedback with stakeholders from across all industry sectors on our innovation strategy, projects and activities. Following a call for expressions of interest in October 2020, 19 members across 10 stakeholder sectors were selected based on a number of criteria including diversity of sector and experience.

This Innovation panel will meet at least twice yearly and will provide a platform for enabling open discussion and feedback on our innovation strategy and plans. The objectives of this panel are to;

- > Guide us on areas that are changing in industry, the economy and our 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



road maps 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 road-maps to ensure that the implementation of our innovation project portfolio provides enduring benefits to our customers and business.
- > Early engagement on the selection, prioritisation and time-line 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

In order to overcome the challenges presented by COVID 19 restrictions, ESB Networks replaced the Spring and Autumn Innovation Forums with the Spring and Autumn Innovation Webinar Series. These webinars proved to be a welcome addition to our engagement channels and enabled a more agile approach to stakeholder engagement, the sharing of information on our innovation activities and the dissemination of project learnings and outcomes. These webinars encouraged interaction through open discussions via an online platform and were attended by a diverse group of stakeholders across government, industry, academia and representative associations. While restrictions continue, it is our intention to hold Spring and Autumn Innovation Webinar

Series to share our innovation progress, discuss feedback we have received, and collaboratively consider how we tackle the transition to the network of the future. We will continue to carry out stakeholder surveys to gauge our understanding of ESB Networks' innovation projects and activities.

We will continue to collaborate with local communities on innovation projects in the Dingle Peninsula, Limerick City and the Aran Islands, as we explore the impact and capabilities of new low-carbon and supporting technologies. In these projects, we are testing and trialling solutions which will help us to develop the decarbonised, decentralised and digitised electricity system of the future and we are working with customers and communities to better understand the impact of and interaction with changing technologies and new, developing energy systems.

**Measure:** We will continue to measure the impact of our innovation stakeholder engagement activities through engagement impact surveys, website & social media metrics, innovation brand score, and stakeholder Feedback..



# ELECTRIFICATION OF HEAT AND TRANSPORT



**ESB Networks has a central role in enabling the electrification of heat and transport. Our imperative is to lead the transition to a secure & affordable low-carbon future, using clean electricity to drive carbon out of heat, transport and the economy.**

Ireland already has one of the highest penetrations of renewable generation in the world and our distribution system has significant capability to connect large numbers of electric vehicles and heat pumps. Thus, increasing the use of the distribution system to electrify heat and transport represents a tremendous opportunity to cost effectively drive carbon out of the economy using clean renewable electricity for our transport systems and the heating of our homes and businesses.

The Climate Action Plan calls for 1 million electric vehicles and 600,000 heat pumps to be operational in homes and businesses by 2030. This will have implications for the development and operation of our network. We are developing system Network solutions and capability to enable this to happen, targeting a phased and least cost approach.

We will engage and collaborate extensively with customers and stakeholders as this evolves to develop a cost effective, smart, sustainable and resilient distribution system that will enable our customers transition to electrified heat and transport.

**Objective:** Provide our customers and stakeholders with clear information and guidance in relation to the connection of electric vehicles and heat pumps to the distribution system. Collaborate with our stakeholders to ensure a whole system approach is used to optimally develop heat, transport and energy infrastructure.

**Action:** Continue to provide our customers and stakeholders with clear information and guidance in relation to the connection of electric vehicles and heat pumps to the distribution system. For example a new section on electrification went live on our website in July 2020 to inform the public on how ESB Networks is facilitating the electrification of heat and transport. This section, which will be updated accordingly throughout 2021, to guide the public to relevant information on Electric Vehicles, solar panels and heat pumps.



We will ensure continuous collaboration with our stakeholders throughout 2021 through further consultation, publication, meetings and webinars to ensure a whole system approach is used to optimally develop heat, transport and energy infrastructure.

In particular we will work with our stakeholders to provide solutions to a number of issues that have been identified. For instance we will continue to work with stakeholders to determine how best to facilitate the connection of public electric vehicle charge-point infrastructure to the distribution system. A consultation 'New Solutions for Distribution Systems Interfaces for Public On-Street Charging' commenced in 2020. We will respond and discuss feedback and comments our stakeholders may have on this proposal in quarter 1 2021. We will also be providing a stakeholder engagement event early in 2021 to provide further clarity and opportunity for stakeholders to feed into the longterm plans for the electrification of heat and transport.

**Measure:** ESB Networks' Electrification of Heat and Transport Strategy was published for consultation in October 2020. A response to feedback received on this consultation will be complete by early 2021 with a view to having a final strategy as informed by our stakeholders published by end January 2021.



# SMART METERING



**Smart meters form part of the National Climate Action Plan and will support Ireland's transition to a low-carbon future by enabling the development of smart electricity services, such as Time of Use (TOU) tariffs. Our target is to install 2.3 million smart meters in every home, business and farm by the end of 2024. From 2021 we aim to install 500,000 meters per annum for 4 years on a regional basis. From 2021, smart services will be offered to customers who have a smart meter by their electricity supply company.**

**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. The focus of the stakeholder engagement for 2021 will be to maintain consistent engagement with industry stakeholders while promoting awareness of smart meters to customers in new roll-out areas across the country.

A key objective for engagement in 2021, as required by the Regulator, will be to define and deliver the market processes required to support the enablement of smart pre-payment services to customers by the end of 2022.

**Action:** ESB Networks has led the development of a comprehensive industry-wide customer awareness and engagement strategy which ensures high quality public engagement, with consistent messaging across our programme partners, which includes the CRU, DECC, SEAI and electricity supply companies. The customer communication programme for 2021 enhances public awareness and ensures that customers have a high level of trust in the installation process and in those installing the meters.

The engagement programme encompasses multiple activities, including:

- > Political engagement via briefings and information events (restrictions permitting) with national and local elected representatives.
- > Direct customer communications via letters and appointment setting in the lead up to a planned customer meter exchange
- > Targeted print and radio advertising campaigns aligned with roll-out areas,
- > Print & broadcast media outreach – national & local press releases announcing details of the programme.

- > Social media using ESB Networks Twitter/Facebook and Instagram accounts – geo-targeted adverts
- > Enhanced online information including promoted Adwords/expanded FAQs and video material uploaded onto the website.
- > Deployment Contractor branding so that the public can easily identify the partner relationship with ESB Networks.

ESB Networks will lead the engagement with electricity retail market participants to define and agree the market processes required to support the enablement of smart pre-payment services for release at the end of 2022. ESB Networks will enable this by holding design workshops with a view to finalise market change requests by Q2 2021.

**Measure:** Engagement will be measured by stakeholder feedback, daily tracking of customer sentiment through customer call centres, media and social media channels, as well as the findings from quarterly customer sentiment surveys by Red C. In addition, the customer journey will be under constant review to ensure we are offering customers an experience which they are well informed of and happy with.

# CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE



**Our customers are the individuals, communities, councils, businesses, farms, industries and supply companies that are seeking a connection to our network (demand or generation);**

- > That supply or are supplied electricity through our network;
- > That generate electricity or connect storage into our network;
- > That use our network for the provision of systems services;
- > That access our network for telecommunications.

ESB Networks places customers at the centre of our operation, listening, empowering and delivering services to customers and the economy - making it simple and convenient for customers to interact with us.

**Objective:** Customers have advised that they need greater visibility in their interactions with ESB Networks and we are listening. Our engagement objectives include;

- > Streamlining and improving our customer's journeys for connection, planned outage and fault, general queries, meter or service changes and enquires for example.
- > Improving customer service, value, communications, satisfaction and experience;
- > Providing exceptional customer service through our contact centre, adding new interactive platforms that offer a range of new communication channels like web chat, to all our customers.
- > Providing customers with greater visibility and transparency in their interactions with us and offer real time, relevant and accurate information.



**Action:** We are enhancing, integrating and upgrading systems that link to customer interfaces and easy to use applications so that customers can access accurate and real-time information whether it is a new connection, a planned outage or a general customer query.

We are reviewing our internal processes, so they are streamlined and transparent, integrated and digital.

ESB Networks is a complex organisation and to make it easier to do business with us, we are defining single points of contact for multi-site and large customers. Training and educating staff across the organisation from our technicians to our office staff supports a customer focused organisation.

We will continue to provide the information and means to facilitate customers participation in new services such as energy communities, microgeneration, demand management, aggregation and peer-to-peer trading

**Measure:** Our customer satisfaction research, social media and complaint analysis helps us to continually monitor our performance and identify pain points and root causes. These insights feed into our plans and inform our customer transformation programme.



# CONNECTING RENEWABLES



Renewables have traditionally been largely onshore wind farms, however as the renewable industry develops, new renewable sources of generation are increasing. In addition to onshore wind there are now significant numbers of solar farms seeking to connect and we are also seeing an increase in interest in storage. The government target is to have 5GW of offshore renewable energy connected by 2030. There is also a trend towards domestic generation through solar PV and microgeneration.

Communities will play a vital role in the journey towards a low carbon future and can participate in community-led renewable energy projects through support schemes made available by Irish policy initiatives, including the government's Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) and the regulator's generator connection policy called Enduring Connection Policy (ECP).

**Objective:** Provide all renewable 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.

We wish to further support and empower communities in this journey by proactively providing information, advice and guidance in relation to connecting community-led renewable energy projects to the electricity distribution network.

**Action:** We will work with the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU), the Transmission System Operator TSO, EirGrid and industry to put in place the policies, processes, innovative solutions and capability to deliver 10 – 13GW of onshore renewables and 5GW of offshore renewables to the electricity system by 2030.

In particular, ESB Networks has 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.

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 further redesign of our end-to-end process for the delivery of major infrastructure projects by extending 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 during 2021 as this project progresses.

We are establishing a Community-led 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. For any further information relating to community led energy projects please contact us on [communityenergy@esbnetworks.ie](mailto:communityenergy@esbnetworks.ie). We are publishing a guidebook; 'Connecting your Community-Led Renewable Energy Project to the Electricity Network' to help support and explain the steps involved in connecting a community led renewable energy project to the electricity distribution network.

An additional key engagement activity for 2021 will be to continue to provide stakeholders and customers with better information, insight and transparency. For example, the provision of Heatmap data on the ESB Networks website is an important part of that drive; providing an indication of available capacity for new demand and generation customers. The next update of the Heatmap will include the regular update of generation information based on the most up to date load information (Special Load Readings) and contractual commitments. Improvements in the layout and wording will be implemented in 2021 based on the feedback and comments from key stakeholders. The generation information will be updated on a quarterly basis and the demand information annually.

**Measure:** We will continue to provide a broad range of opportunities to engage with our Renewable Stakeholders such as consultations, workshops, forums and bilateral meetings on all of the above initiatives.

We will monitor feedback and customer sentiment in relation to early engagement meetings, connection method meetings, dedicated channels/points of contact in relation to queries and satisfaction with published network information such as the capacity heat maps and our community led renewable energy brochure and liaison panel.



# SAFETY



**Electricity is an essential source of energy for modern society, but it can also be very dangerous unless proper precautions are taken, especially when carrying out works near to the electricity networks. Safety is central to everything we do in ESB Networks and we are fully committed to protecting the safety, health and well-being of our employees, contractors, customers, members of the public and others who may be impacted by our work activities.**

**Objective:** Public Safety

The safety of the public is a key objective and is part of our regulatory licence requirement. We aim to ensure that we do all we reasonably can to protect the public and their property from injury and damage associated with the electricity network.

**Actions:** This means that we design, operate, manage, maintain the electricity network to the required standards, including delivery of the public safety programme and implementation of required operational protocols and processes.

We communicate, inform and engage with the public across all sectors so that they are aware of the hazards associated with the electricity networks. We run public safety media and digital campaigns, supported by print media, in addition to targeted campaigns and events for specific industries including construction, farming and schools.

We provide a 24/7 emergency service and various resources including our Dial before you dig service for obtaining electricity network records.

**Measure:** Our success will be measured by the growth in knowledge, awareness and safe behaviours of the general public and others who may be impacted by our work activities. Metrics will include programme delivery performance, media awareness measures and incident severity trends.

# THE ENVIRONMENT



**ESB Networks recognises that our activities have environmental impacts and that we have a responsibility to manage these impacts in a manner that prevents pollution and provides a high level of protection for the natural environment, while also contributing to the sustainable development of our economy.**

This involves continuous improvement in transforming our environmental performance across all our operations, reducing our carbon footprint, increasing our energy efficiency and delivering on our commitments under the European DSO Sustainable Grid Charter, all while ensuring that our actions and reporting are open, transparent and consistent with our values.

ESB Networks utilises an Environmental Management System which is externally certified to the ISO 14001 Standard. Furthermore, ESB Networks has an established Environmental Policy, along with internal Company Standards and Procedures. These systems, working in tandem with our committed staff, ensure we comply with the highest standard of environmental management and are continually striving to embed sustainable practices in all of our activities

**Objective:** Transparent Environmental Reporting

We are committed to ensuring that ESB Networks is open and transparent in communicating its environmental performance.

**Action:** Review and continue to enhance the environmental information publicly available on our external website.

**Measure:** Our success will be measured by having an external website which provides our stakeholders with the environmental information they require. Metrics will include usage data of the new website and feedback from our stakeholders who use the website.

**Objective:** Managing Environmental Incidents

A key component of our environmental management commitments is communications with our stakeholders regarding environmental incidents.

**Action:** Ensure proactive engagement with relevant authorities through formalised reporting protocols, particularly with regard to the notification, assessment and management of environmental incidents.

**Measure:** Through proactive and transparent engagement, ESB Networks ensures that all relevant stakeholders receive the information they require regarding environmental incidents.



# 06. CONCLUSION

To ensure continuous stakeholder engagement improvement into the future, we will 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. We will adopt clear transparent and balanced reporting and we will improve accessibility of stakeholder information on our website and other engagement platforms such as our Stakeholder Newsletter, Strategic Webinar Series and the creation of External Stakeholder Panels.

We are setting up a broad-based Customer & Society Panel in 2021 which will meet twice yearly and help to inform our business planning and engagement activities. The panel will have a broad representation of our stakeholders and will help to:

- > Guide us on areas that are changing in society (perhaps emerging concerns) and that may influence our thinking and planning,
- > Enable us to brief key society stakeholder groups on our key initiatives and plans;
- > Provide an opportunity for a critical external perspective (and sounding board) on our business and enable us to consider feedback and suggestions
- > Help prioritise our stakeholder engagement activities

This document outlines ESB Networks areas of engagement focus for 2021, which has been framed by our business strategy and the needs of our stakeholders as determined through feedback and ongoing collaboration. It also includes in tabular format, lists and timings of our proposed engagement activities (consultations, publications, meetings, forums, working groups, events and webinars) proposed for the year ahead. These tables will also be published on our website which will allow us to provide regular updates on this plan to our stakeholders throughout the year.

We are now publishing this document for consultation to allow our customers and stakeholders further opportunity to shape this plan for 2021 and beyond. We look forward to further collaboration and hearing your feedback which can be submitted directly to [stakeholder@esbnetworks.ie](mailto:stakeholder@esbnetworks.ie)

We look forward to hearing your views which will help further shape our plans for 2021 and beyond.



# APPENDICES

**TABLE 1 CONSULTATIONS**

Planned public consultations in 2021 that ESB networks leads/contributes to include the following;

Consultation	Objective	Mechanism	Timing	Audience
<b>ESB Networks Engagement Strategy &amp; Plan 2021</b>	Seek feedback on ESB Networks proposed engagement strategy and plan for 2021 such that it is fully informed and shaped by both our business and stakeholders needs	ESB Networks Consultation	Q4 2020- Q1 2021	ALL
<b>ESB Networks 2020-2030 Strategy</b>	Gather insights on ESB Networks strategy to 2030, which sets a broad framework for how we intend to navigate the next ten years, delivering on the government Climate Action Plan	ESB Networks Consultation	Q1	ALL
<b>ESB Networks Report on Stakeholder Engagement in 2020</b>	Describe and capture our stakeholder engagement approach and activities during 2020 and seek stakeholder views and feedback on our engagement performance for 2020	ESB Networks Consultation	Q1	ALL
<b>ESB Networks Engagement Strategy &amp; Plan 2022</b>	Seek feedback on ESB Networks proposed engagement strategy and plan for 2022 such that it is fully informed and shaped by both our business and stakeholders needs	ESB Networks Consultation	Q4	ALL
<b>Distribution Annual Performance Report 2020</b>	Seek stakeholder feedback on Distribution Annual Performance Report 2020.	ESB Networks Consultation	Q3	ALL
<b>Joint TSO &amp; TAO Investment Planning and Delivery Report 2020</b>	Seek stakeholder feedback on TSO & TAO Electricity Transmission Performance Report 2020	ESB Networks/EirGrid Consultation	Q3	ALL
<b>Joint TSO &amp; TAO Electricity Transmission Performance Report 2020</b>	Seek Stakeholder feedback on TSO & TAO Investment Planning and Delivery Report 2020.	ESB Networks/EirGrid Consultation	Q3	ALL
<b>Public Safety Strategy</b>	Gather stakeholder input to help shape and develop ESB Networks Public Safety Strategy	ESB Networks Consultation	Q1	ALL



Consultation	Objective	Mechanism	Timing	Audience
<b>Active System Management: Consultation on key high-level design and development issues</b>	Ensure that effective and accessible proposals are developed, based on a strong customer and stakeholder voice in setting the direction of the active system management project	ESB Networks Consultations	Q2 to Q4	Customers & communities Industry participants Technology sector
<b>Smart Metering: Customer awareness &amp; satisfaction research for the NSMP</b>	Red C to run 4 waves of research throughout the year to monitor customer sentiment and concerns	Customer surveys	Quarterly	Customers
<b>Innovation for the Network of the Future 2021</b>	Consultation to share information on ESB Networks innovation strategy, activities/projects	ESB Networks Consultation	Q1	ALL

## TABLE 2 PUBLICATIONS

Reports/information booklets/data sharing on website;

Publication	Objective	Mechanism	Timing	Audience
<b>Stakeholder Newsletter</b>	To provide regular updates and overview of engagement activities/ opportunities between ESB Networks and stakeholders	Quarterly newsletter emailed to relevant stakeholders and link on ESB Networks website to subscribe	Quarterly	ALL
<b>Response paper on ESB Networks Engagement Strategy &amp; Plan 2021</b>	To summarise stakeholder feedback received during the consultation process and explain how ESB Networks will respond, adjust and implement any necessary changes to Engagement Plans for 2021	Publication on ESB Networks website	Q1	ALL
<b>Response paper on ESB Networks Report on Stakeholder Engagement in 2020</b>	To summarise the responses received during the consultation process and explain how ESB Networks will respond to this feedback	Publication on ESB Networks website	Q2	ALL
<b>Distribution Annual Performance Report 2020</b>	Annual summary of the Distribution System Operator's activities over the previous calendar year	Publication on ESB Networks website	Q4	ALL
<b>Joint TSO &amp; TAO Investment Planning and Delivery Final Report 2020</b>	Final CRU Approval on TSO & TAO Investment Planning and Delivery 2020	Publication on ESB Networks website	Q4	ALL
<b>Joint TSO &amp; TAO Electricity Transmission Performance Final Report 2020</b>	Final CRU Approval on TSO & TAO Electricity Transmission Performance Report 2020	Publication on ESB Networks website	Q4	ALL
<b>Electrification of Heat &amp; Transport Final Strategy Document (post 2020 consultation)</b>	To outline ESB Networks strategy for the electrification of Heat & Transport which was developed through consultation with key stakeholder groups during 2020	Publication on ESB Networks website	Q1	ALL

**TABLE 3 PATHWAYS TO ENGAGEMENT**

ESB Networks hosted meetings, working groups, events and webinars 2021

Publication	Objective	Mechanism	Timing	Audience
<b>Active System Management: A range of key high-level design and project development decisions, relating to power system capabilities &amp; requirements, market design, signalling &amp; data exchange and project roadmap</b>	Provide customers and stakeholders with relevant technical and roadmap information, to enable their future participation in active system management products and services, and pilot activities	Publications on ESB Networks website	Q3 – Q4	Customers & communities Energy & renewables sector Technology sector
<b>Public Safety Strategy</b>	Inform and educate the public about safe behaviours in relation to the electricity distribution network	Publication on ESB Networks website	Q2	ALL
<b>Smart Metering Video material – ‘How to Read Your New Meter’</b>	To help customers to read their new meter & support the provision of new smart services from Suppliers	Video uploaded on ESB Networks website	Q1	Customers and stakeholders
<b>Response Paper on Innovation for the Network of the Future</b>	To provide ESB networks response to feedback received on the Innovation for the Network of the Future 2021 consultation	Publication on ESB Networks website	Q2	ALL
<b>Heat Capacity Maps</b>	Provide an indication of available network capacity for new demand and generation customers	Interactive map on ESB Networks website	Ongoing	ALL
<b>Community-led renewable energy projects guidebook</b>	Increase customer knowledge of the connection process, CRU policies and to highlight the lower barrier to entry for community-led projects	Publication on ESB Networks website	Q1	Customers and stakeholders

Consultation	Objective	Mechanism	Timing	Audience
<b>Customer &amp; Society Panel</b>	Provide an opportunity for a critical external perspective (and sounding board) on our business planning and engagement activities and enable us to consider feedback and suggestions	Bi- annual meeting	Q2 & Q4	Domestic, Vulnerable, Business, large industry Suppliers & Generators Major Renewables, Sustainability, Community & Climate, Safety, Emergency response, Infrastructure development, Housing, Farming, Academia (Skills, Youth)
<b>Innovation Panel</b>	Provide early engagement on the selection & prioritisation & 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	Bi- annual meeting	Q2 & Q4	Micro/Mini generation E-Heat & E-Transport Energy Flexibility & Storage Bodies Academic/ Research Industry Consultants Energy Agencies/ Authorities Equipment/Systems Manufacturers Electricity Suppliers Utility/TSO Renewable Electricity Sector
<b>Active System Management</b>	Consultation on key high-level design and development issues: establish research / evidence-based understanding of relevant customer preferences	Focus groups & surveys	Q2 – Q4	Customers & communities
	Ensure that key high-level design and project development decisions are informed by customer and stakeholder voices	Road table consultations	Q2 – Q4	Customers & communities Energy & renewables sector Technology sector



Consultation	Objective	Mechanism	Timing	Audience
<b>ESB Networks Strategic Webinar Series</b>	Provide high level engagement opportunity on ESB Networks business strategy and plans	Series of targeted interactive webinars on various topics including: ESB Networks Strategy Grid Investment Study Connecting Community-Led Renewable Energy Projects Electrification of Heat & Transport Transforming Energy Systems for a Low Carbon Future	Q1 Q1 Q1 Q2 Q2	ALL
<b>Innovation Spring &amp; Autumn Series of Webinars</b>	Sharing of information on our innovation activities and the dissemination of project learnings and outcomes	Series of targeted interactive webinars as informed by stakeholders	Q2 & Q3	ALL
<b>Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP)</b>	The Distribution Code is the set of rules that specifies the technical aspects and relationships between the DSO and all other users. The Distribution Code is kept under review and updated as required through the Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP). The DCRP meets quarterly and is chaired and coordinated by ESB Networks as the DSO	Quarterly meetings	Q1 – Q4	Members of the DCRP - representative of various types of Users of the Distribution System, plus the DSO, TSO and the CRU
<b>Smart Metering: Engagement with industry - Industry Liaison Group &amp; Comms and Engagement Working Group</b>	Monthly meetings with the Programme's Partners to discuss open items / plan ahead	Conference call	Monthly	CRU, DECC, SEAI and electricity suppliers
<b>Smart Metering: Information events for stakeholder groups</b>	Brief local stakeholders in roll out areas to answer questions and raise awareness of programme.	Information sessions/ evenings (Covid-19 restrictions permitting).	Q3 & Q4 (restrictions permitting)	Elected representatives & local stakeholder groups

Consultation	Objective	Mechanism	Timing	Audience
<b>Smart Metering: Pre-payment service working group</b>	Define the changes to electricity retail market processes and supporting IT systems to enable the launch of prepayment services from end of 2022	Design workshops	Q1-Q2	Industry participants
<b>Construction Safety Partnership Advisory Committee</b>	Promote best practice of electricity safety in construction	Quarterly meetings	Q1-Q4	CIF, HSA, LGMA, Engineers Ireland, SOLAS, Govt depts.
<b>Farm Safety Partnership Advisory Committee</b>	Promote best practice of farm electricity safety in farming	Quarterly meetings	Q1-Q4	Teagasc, FBD, HSA, Dept of Agriculture
<b>Safety Joint Utility Forum</b>	Share safety best practice and learnings across utilities	Bi-annual Meeting	Q2 & Q4	Public utilities, GNI, EIR, Irish Water
<b>FlexTech (Flexible Technology Integration Initiative)</b>	Remove barriers to renewable integration across 5 work streams i.e. Hybrid, Storage, Large Energy Users, Demand Side Management, Small Scale and Renewable Generation	Regular monthly meetings or more frequent dependent on project/workstream engagement	Monthly	EirGrid, NIE Networks, SONI. (Plus, engagement with Industry & CRU through separate planned Forums)
<b>Community – led Renewables Energy Liaison Panel</b>	Introduce the initiatives being provided by ESB Networks to assist community-led renewable energy projects	Regular engagement with stakeholders in relation to the connection of community-led renewable energy projects, (website, FAQ dedicated email)	(Plus, engagement with Industry & CRU through separate planned Forums.)	Renewable Energy sector/communities
<b>Enduring Connection Policy Information Webinars – ECP2.2</b>	Present and explain the ruleset relating to ECP2.2	Interactive webinars	Q2-Q3	Renewable Energy sector/communities
<b>Lean Connections Project Engagement</b>	Engagement with key stakeholder groups on the development of the Lean Connections Project	Bilateral meetings, workshops and webinars	Ongoing	ALL

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