

ESB Networks,  
East Wall Road  
Dublin 3,  
D03 R583.

4<sup>th</sup> March 2025

**Re: Innovation 2025 - Innovation To Deliver Networks For Net Zero**

To whom it may concern,

Cork Chamber welcomes the opportunity to contribute to ESB Networks' Innovation annual consultation for 2025.

Cork Chamber represents 1,200 members together employing 130,000 people throughout the city, metropolitan area and county. Our vision is to lead a transforming and ambitious Cork City and County, and our purpose is to unite, represent and support our members and community. Our direction is guided by our formal pledge to uphold the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Cork Chamber has also been designated an SDG Champion by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications for 2024-25.

Cork Chamber's advocacy efforts are guided by the views and priorities of our members, and are shaped by our continuous engagement with members, our board and key stakeholders in Cork City and County. Both renewable energy and sustainability have been identified as key priority areas for progress in our engagement with members.

Ireland has immense potential to grow its domestic renewable energy sector at present, an opportunity which will contribute to the achievement of our climate goals, while also bringing significant economic benefit for the country as a whole. In the current climate of evolving geopolitics and anticipated economic headwinds, securing our energy supply for the future and enhancing our energy independence has never been more critical.

The Cork region has a rich energy heritage, centred around Cork Harbour, with many key industry players located in the city and county, including a significant ESB presence. Cork has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build on its existing infrastructure, skills and experience to become the first of the national hubs for the renewable energy sector.

To this end, Cork Chamber established the Cork Offshore Renewable Industry Forum (CORIF) in 2024, bringing together representatives of the offshore renewables industry in Cork. The forum works to identify and advocate for key policy and infrastructure enablers that will

ensure Cork and Ireland capitalise fully on the development of offshore renewables in the years to come.

We welcome ESB Networks' commitment to supporting population growth, economic development, and the transition to a net-zero future in the years ahead through innovative projects and advancements that will enhance the capacity of the network to support the electricity demands of additional housing, jobs and infrastructure.

Cork Chamber looks forward to continuing positive engagement with ESB Networks in relation to these critical issues going forward, and to the publication of ESB Networks' new Innovation Strategy in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Cathal McSweeney

Director of Public and International Affairs

**1. What emerging trends, technologies, or innovation areas do you see as opportunities for collaboration with ESB Networks to support Ireland's Net Zero goals?**

Ireland has set out ambitious targets to reach net-zero emissions by 2050, a commitment which will demand a resilient and future-proof distribution network. In this regard, Cork Chamber welcomes the commitment by ESB Networks to deliver a net-zero ready distribution network by 2040 under the Networks for Net Zero Strategy.

Ireland's climate goals are critical, not only to mitigating the impact of climate change, but also to securing our economy into the future. As industry and private individuals alike prioritise more sustainable practices, it is vital that Ireland's networks are equipped to adapt to this changing climate, while also enhancing capacity to facilitate increased demand.

Collaboration with the business community can play an important role in this regard, supporting ESB Networks in identifying emerging trends in decarbonisation and potential areas where electricity demand may increase.

As acknowledged in the consultation document, the landscape has evolved significantly since the publication of ESB Networks' current innovation strategy in 2017. The impact of climate change on our communities and businesses has become far more tangible - the impact of recent storms on electricity supply across the country is an acute example. The urgency of implementing climate action across all sectors of the economy has increased considerably, as evidenced in national and EU-wide policy.

Feedback from Cork Chamber's members consistently speaks to the fact that sustainability and net-zero policies have risen to the top of the agenda for many businesses, from SMEs to multinationals, in the intervening years, providing an opportunity for more enhanced collaboration on innovation strategies and projects, both with individual businesses and with business representative organisations.

**2. Are there flagship projects or large-scale initiatives you would like to collaborate on with ESB Networks to drive innovation and deliver transformative outcomes?**

Cork Chamber welcomes ESB Networks' commitment to deliver on accelerated decarbonisation targets. Innovative programmes, collaborations and partnerships are essential to meet these ambitious targets.

Both Cork and Dublin have been designated EU mission cities for climate neutrality to 2030, and Cork Chamber is proud to play a role in supporting this mission, helping to progress large-scale decarbonisation projects in Cork alongside Cork City Council. Ensuring that the electricity network has the capacity to manage the increased electrification required to facilitate many of these projects will be crucial to progress made under the mission cities initiative.

ESB Networks' commitment to accelerating the delivery of innovative projects where appropriate is very welcome, as is the commitment to enhancing collaboration with key stakeholders in this regard. The ambitions detailed in the consultation document with regard

to the ElectriCITY project are particularly welcome, and opportunities to implement similar projects in areas of Cork city should be explored to complement the work being done by Cork City Council and other stakeholders in advancing Cork as a mission city for climate neutrality.

The Cork Docklands area is currently undergoing a significant regeneration project, one of the largest projects of this type in Europe, to transform the region from an industrial and commercial zone into a sustainable, urban community in the heart of Cork city, supported by extensive housing and infrastructure development. Projects like this could provide an opportunity for innovative collaboration with ESB Networks to help create a sustainable, future-proof community, potentially providing a platform for the roll-out of some of ESB's emerging innovation projects.

### **3. How can we implement innovative solutions together to build a more resilient and adaptive electricity network, addressing challenges such as climate change and electrification?**

Collaboration among providers of critical infrastructure, as well as local authorities, developers, and local communities and businesses is key to identifying and advancing the innovative solutions required to address the challenges we face in the years ahead.

ESB Networks' area of focus regarding 'Network Capacity and Flexibility' will be particularly important in this regard, as the electricity network will be required to manage ever-increasing demand from new housing, new industry and accelerating decarbonisation efforts across all sectors.

In the area of renewable energy, enhancing capacity will be particularly important. In Cork, the opportunity for the development of the renewable energy sector is immense. Plans for the development of offshore wind are already well underway; following the approval of the South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAP) last year, EirGrid is undertaking a significant project, 'Powering Up Offshore South Coast,' to develop the new transmission grid infrastructure required to bring power generated by offshore wind ashore to connect with the national grid.

The demand for additional energy supply is already clear, particularly in the Cork region. With energy-intensive industries, such as tech, seeking to expand their footprint in Ireland and looking beyond the Dublin region for opportunities to invest and grow, it is vital that swift grid connections and flexible supply are provided for across the country. Securing investment and new economic opportunities for Cork and other regions is dependent on our capacity to guarantee security of supply.

Alongside the economic imperative of facilitating growth in renewable energy, there is a climate imperative too. While the immediate economic need to guarantee supply and security is crucial to secure investment, innovation and flexibility in our electricity supply will be key to

sustaining industries and sectors by providing the long-term certainty needed to continue doing business in Ireland.

In this regard, battery storage also has a key role to play in future-proofing our electricity supply and supporting the decarbonisation of our electricity system. Deploying battery storage to support the grid will also be critical to ensuring that the electricity network has the capacity to manage fluctuations in supply as additional renewables come onstream. ESB is already at the forefront of battery storage innovation, and the significant investment already made in battery storage facilities at Aghada, Co. Cork is very welcome.

#### **4. In what ways can digitalisation, AI, and open data be utilised to drive efficiency and innovation across the energy ecosystem?**

ESB Networks' commitment to exploring emerging trends in digitalisation, AI and open data to increase efficiencies and innovation in the energy ecosystem is to be welcomed. The use of new technologies should be evaluated to take account of the technologies' environmental impact to ensure that the application of any new technologies does not negate the efficiency it brings to the energy ecosystem. Enhancing the sustainability and energy efficiency of the energy ecosystem as a whole should be to the fore when deploying new technologies and innovations. ESB Networks' commitment to exploring opportunities to enhance circularity and biodiversity across the network is also welcome in this regard.

The volume of data collected by businesses in relation to their energy usage and energy needs has steadily increased in recent years, expedited by the introduction of legislation at EU level setting out enhanced reporting requirements for businesses. The European Commission has recently proposed to amend the Audit Directive, Accounting Directive, Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive to create a new Omnibus package.<sup>1</sup> This will result in clearer, simplified reporting rules for businesses of all sizes, ensuring that reporting from businesses across the EU is more uniform, which in turn could allow for increased efficiencies in data analysis and use by ESB Networks.

With ever-increasing demands on the electricity network from all sectors of the economy, further collaboration with businesses to deploy energy data to guide innovation could be very beneficial.

#### **5. Are you open to collaborating with ESB Networks and in what context would you like to collaborate? If not, are their obstacles preventing you from collaborating with us?**

Cork Chamber enjoys constructive engagement with many key utility providers at both local and national level and welcomes ESB Networks' commitment to engage with other utility providers to exchange learnings and innovations, as well as the proposal of a new approach

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, '[Commission simplifies rules on sustainability and EU investments, delivering over €6 billion in administrative relief](#)'

to collaboration with external stakeholders. The Chamber also looks forward to the publication of ESB Networks' new innovation strategy in Q2 2025.

As part of the Chamber's public affairs advocacy work, we actively engage with providers of critical utilities with a view to advancing members' priorities across a range of critical areas. Cork Chamber's members have identified eight key priorities for progress, including housing, infrastructure development and renewable energy growth.

Improving the alignment between critical infrastructure providers is crucial to accelerate much-needed housing development; in Cork, upwards of 10,000 housing units per year are estimated to be needed to keep pace with demand. Alongside water and wastewater, local authorities and developers, ESB has a key role to play in providing for accelerated housing development, ensuring that new housing developments can benefit from timely connection to the electricity network.

In addition, the growth of renewable energy is another key priority for Cork Chamber's members. The Cork region, and the Cork Harbour region in particular, has the potential to become the first of the national hubs for the renewable energy sector, given the region's extensive energy heritage and significant existing infrastructure.

Cork Chamber established the Cork Offshore Renewable Industry Forum (CORIF) in 2024 to bring together industry representatives in Cork to advocate for the delivery of the policy and infrastructure enablers needed to support Cork in reaching its full potential.

Cork Chamber also coordinates the work of the Cork Development Forum (CDF), which brings together a range of stakeholders in Cork, representing the construction, education and enterprise sectors, among others, to discuss and advance key priorities for Cork.

The Cork Chamber team would be delighted to build on existing engagement with ESB Networks with a view to progressing shared priorities for the Cork region. Engagement with both the CDF and CORIF could provide a beneficial platform to discuss shared objectives and priorities.