

**ESB Annual General Meeting**  
**Wednesday 30 April 2025**

***Statement by ESB ESOP Trustee Limited on behalf of the 7,800 participants in the ESB  
Employee Share Ownership Plan (ESOP)***

Chairman, thank you for inviting me to address the meeting on behalf of the ESOP, representing 7,800 participants who comprise both current and former staff who hold stock in the capital of ESB.

To begin, I would like to congratulate Pat Gaynor and Jim Meade on their appointment to the Board in December 2024 and to recognise also the contributions of Paul Lynam and Alf Smiddy over their respective eight-year terms on the Board.

Significant weather events have dominated the past 12 months, with Storms Isha, Darragh and Eowyn in particular, having had catastrophic impacts on the electricity network. Whilst the increasing occurrence of such events poses significant challenges in terms of building, maintaining and funding a resilient network, it would be remiss not to recognise and applaud the, at times herculean, efforts of ESB staff in restoring power to effected customers. As has come to be expected, ESB staff responded to and rose to the extreme challenges faced.

However, this is not to brush aside the very significant issues that urgently require to be addressed, not only by the ESB but also by EirGrid and Government. The constant push towards greening our energy supplies – which is of course to be welcomed – has the inevitable result of increasing the consumption and hence the need for distribution of electric power. Climate change affects the maintenance and resilience of the network and will require greatly increased levels of investment to protect supplies. Each of the players have their roles to play and it is not reasonable to place the primary onus on ESB to pick up the pieces that fall due to lack of investment and delivery of sorely needed infrastructure. Government has a key part to play in imposing a more purposive stance in relation to the rights to object and hamper the development of key infrastructure for the benefit of the majority and not allowing the noisy objectors to hijack timing and the agenda. It is simply not good enough to continue to place the blame on, for example, the Aarhus Convention or on rights to judicial review – other European countries navigate these issues without enabling constant frustration of vital plans. Despite many statements to the contrary, including the new planning act, there is little real evidence of this particular nut being cracked in Ireland, but cracked it must be. The new taskforce on infrastructure is welcome but needs to address these issues and to move the focus away from compliance with process and towards delivery of actual physical outcomes.

Given the scale of the investment that will be required to reinforce the grid and network and increase the percentage of green power generated, the added costs of dealing with years of obstruction are simply uneconomic, indeed they are untenable, whether for ESB or any other commercial entity.

The ESOP is a long-term shareholder in ESB and notes these issues with growing concern. ESB clearly has a major role in addressing and reacting to events as they arise and planning for greater resilience and volume in the future and must continue to take, and be allowed by the majority shareholder to take, a businesslike approach to these challenges and cease to be the fall-guy for the latent short-comings of others. Subject to all shareholders being treated fairly, as has been the case since the abstraction of assets to create EirGrid disregarded the rights of this minority shareholder, the Board and Company will have our full support on this particular journey.

More generally, continued investment in people, demonstrated by the growth in numbers employed and especially by the successful revitalisation of apprenticeship and training programmes and the promotion of diversity, equity and inclusion is welcomed. The ESOP is seeing a significant number of those new joiners interested in joining the share scheme.

Turning now to the financial performance of the ESB Group in 2024. Operating profit before exceptional items of €975m and record capital expenditure of €2.2bn in energy infrastructure demonstrate the extraordinary scale of the Group and its operations. The ESOP congratulates the Board, management and staff on this very solid performance.

As stated on previous occasions, the ESOP supports consistency of dividend policy.

The Group has continued to borrow very significant sums in order to deliver its large capital projects plan. Doing so prudently requires stability of credit ratings and these in turn require regulatory regime consistency across the whole panoply of the energy markets - most especially in the regulated asset space. It remains to be seen what the limits are to this financing approach but any departure will require an even stronger commitment to stability and consistency of regulation if new funding is to be priced competitively.

Stability in the regulatory environment and joined up thinking in the overall energy policy area are therefore required if ESB is to deliver its ambitious targets – a characteristic that has at times seemed to be in short supply and my earlier remarks on the planning hiatus focus only on one aspect of what is a broader issue. In reiterating our comments from previous years, long-term strategic planning, not only by the ESB Group but also by regulators and policy makers, and a clear view of the route and interim steps to the delivery of longer-term objectives is essential in an industry where short-term thinking is invariably punished.

We thank you Chairman, the Board, Chief Executive, management and staff for the continued commitment to maintaining ESB's strength in these continually challenging times.

Turning briefly to the ESOP's own business, the twelfth internal market in ESB stock was successfully held in September 2024 and we are currently preparing for this year's market – an event that is now eagerly awaited by many staff members.

We continue to review and assess the performance of the market, in particular the challenges in maintaining a level of liquidity and, on behalf of the ESOP, I would like to recognise and thank those involved from the Company and the Group of Unions and the Government Departments for their support and engagement with us.

Finally, I would remind the meeting that as the ESOP Trustee votes certain of the stock at its own discretion and also represents at the meeting those participants who have the right to decide how to vote their own stock, I will be voting in accordance with those directions as well as at the direction of the ESOP Trustee Board. This, as has happened before, will result in a mix of abstentions and votes both for and against the motions and resolutions put to the meeting.

Thank you.

David Beattie  
ESOP Chairman  
30 April 2025