

SONI Forward Work Plan

2023 – 24

Appendix 6 Stakeholder Engagement

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Stakeholder engagement

SONI Forward Work Plan 2023-2024

Stakeholder engagement is one of the four SONI outcomes and an important criterion by which SONI is assessed as part of the Evaluative Performance Framework.

The Evaluative Performance Framework Process for the Forward Work Plan 2022-2023 provided valuable feedback for SONI.

This appendix sets out SONI's Stakeholder Engagement process in terms of how we engage, why we engage and what we use the stakeholder information for. We will also detail the stakeholder segmentations that we work with through each of the four SONI TSO roles and set out our planned engagement activities for the period October 2023 to September 2024 across each role.

SONI's Response to Stakeholder Feedback

SONI received feedback during the assessment phase of the Forward Work Plan 2022-2023 Evaluative Performance Framework from:

- The stakeholder submissions¹ provided to, and published by, the UR in their call for stakeholder submissions on the SONI Forward Work Plan 2022-2023
- The stakeholder event² which was held on 15 November 2022
- Queries received from the independent panel during their evaluation process.
- The panel's publication of their [Evaluative Performance Report](#) published on the UR website on 9 February 2023
- The Utility Regulators determination³ on the assessment of the SONI Forward Work Plan 2022 - 2023

In this document, the section "How Feedback Shaped SONI's Forward Work Plan" collates the feedback received across key areas such as KPIs, deliverables, and assessment criteria during the 2021-22 phase and highlights the improvements that SONI has made in the 2022-23 Plan to address these points.

¹ [SONI's Forward Work Plan - consultation responses | Utility Regulator \(uregni.gov.uk\)](#)

² [SONI Evaluative Performance Framework Annual Forward Plan 2022/23 - publication of stakeholder responses | Utility Regulator \(uregni.gov.uk\)](#)

³ [Decision published on SONI's Forward Work Plan 2022/2023 Financial Incentive | Utility Regulator \(uregni.gov.uk\)](#)

SONI Stakeholder Engagement

Overview

This section will focus on how SONI engages, why we engage and what we do with the feedback we receive during the engagement process.

Since the publication of the Forward Work Plan 2022/23, SONI has undertaken a comprehensive Stakeholder Needs Assessment. This assessment will form the basis of a project to develop a Stakeholder Management Strategy which is detailed in the Forward Work Plan 2023/24. Whilst this Strategy has not yet been undertaken, we can provide a high-level overview of key strategic engagements planned for 2023/24.

Stakeholder engagement is a core theme of the Evaluative Performance Framework, runs through all roles and is important for the successful achievement of the four SONI outcomes, as well as holding its own pillar within our Shaping Our Electricity Future roadmap.

Why We Engage

SONI believes that truly successful engagement is making informed decisions utilising all available insights. It takes place in every team and every level of our organisation, and it is a fundamental enabler of our mission.

We set out to ensure that those who are affected by activities and plans are afforded the opportunity to have an input into the process and to understand how their contributions have been taken on board, resulting in better outcomes for all.

While not everyone will agree with the decisions made, everyone should have an equal chance to have their say, to understand why decisions are made, and to feel that decisions are made in a fair and open way.

In SONI's new Stakeholder Management Strategy, we will set out new principles and values to drive our approach to engagement.

However, as a minimum, a successful approach for SONI:

- delivers on our wider values.
- develops an engagement culture at every level and in every team within our organisation.
- ensures stakeholders are aware of engagement activities.
- communicates clearly with stakeholders, using accessible language to communicate our proposals and policies.
- utilises honest, meaningful dialogue to communicate challenges.
- allows enough time for stakeholders to consider the information provided, and to give us their views.
- offers clear opportunities for our stakeholders to have their say.
- explains the decisions needed to be made and the timeline; and
- ensures learnings experienced during initial rounds of engagement are applied to later rounds.

Stakeholder Identification & Mapping

As part of SONI's new Stakeholder Management Strategy, we will set out a revised process for Stakeholder Identification and Mapping. This process will be grounded in best practice within the external affairs industry.⁴

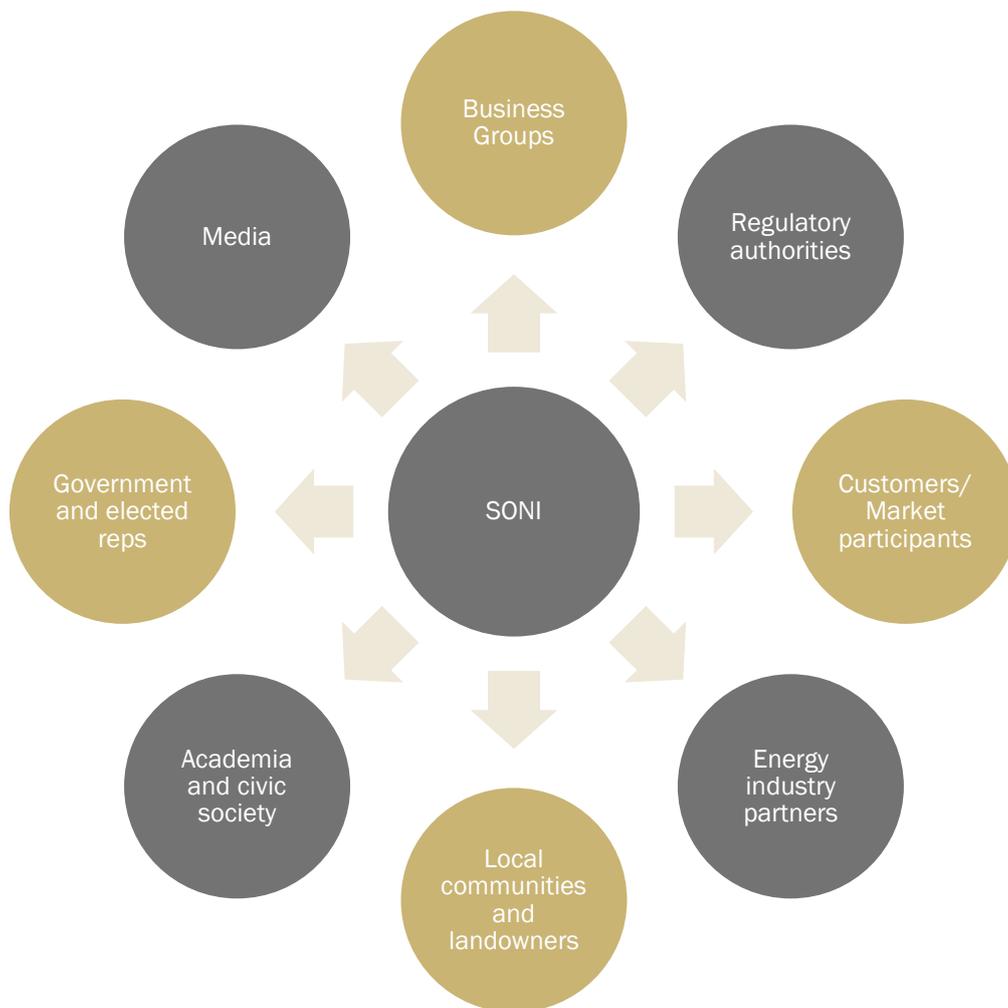


Figure 1: SONI Stakeholders

⁴ The above segmentation was developed for the purposes of the Stakeholder Needs Assessment Exercise. The groupings were identified in collaboration between SONI Subject Matter Experts and an external expert stakeholder engagement adviser.

Our Commitment to Stakeholders

Introduction

As an organisation, SONI is engaging with our key stakeholders every day, at multiple levels and across almost every team and workstream – it is a core part of our business-as-usual activity. For example, between October 2022 – March 2023, we assessed that over 600 engagements took place between SONI and our key stakeholders⁵.

This section details the work we have already undertaken to respond to previous feedback and our plans for the future.

Given the scale of stakeholder engagement that takes place and as our work to support the delivery of the Northern Ireland Energy Strategy has intensified, we identified the requirement to better understand the needs of our stakeholders in order to be able to assess our effectiveness in delivering against those needs at a strategic level.

To develop this understanding, SONI commissioned an independent Stakeholder Needs Assessment project in May 2023 as part of our Forward Work Plan 2022/2023. The outcomes of this project will equip us with the valuable insight we need to hone and further enhance our approach to stakeholder engagement at all levels of our organisation.

In recent years we have reviewed and transformed our public and stakeholder engagement in relation to transmission grid infrastructure. We have developed a framework for decision making which puts accessible communications, digitalisation, outreach with communities and stakeholders at the heart of our approach, and we are committed to further improvements.

We will also continue to invest our time and resources in a strategic and transparent approach to regulatory engagement. The UR is a principal stakeholder in our new focus on decarbonisation.

As our work in supporting the delivery of the Northern Ireland Energy Strategy intensifies, we have identified the need to consider further enhancements to our engagement, including the development and publication of a Stakeholder Management Strategy and accompanying evaluation framework.

This Strategy will set out our strategic approach to engaging with our key stakeholders and a number of core engagement workstreams. The evaluation framework will set out a proportionate and meaningful approach to monitoring and assessing our success in delivering against our commitments.

⁵ [SONI Mid - Year Performance Report 2022/2023](#) Page 19

Stakeholder Needs Assessment and Stakeholder Management Strategy⁶

This project has provided us with vital insights into a range of areas including the views of stakeholders on the areas SONI should prioritise, their experience of engaging with us to date, and their future engagement needs.

The findings of the Stakeholder Needs Assessment will be used to develop the Stakeholder Management Strategy and accompanying evaluation framework.

⁶ This deliverable is detailed in Appendix 2: SONI Deliverables for Role 2 Independent Expert

How Stakeholder Views Formed SONI's Forward Work Plan

In preparation of the Forward Work Plan 2023 – 2024, SONI has reviewed and considered the stakeholder submissions provided, and what actions we can take to demonstrate improvements in the areas called out in these submissions.

In the section below, we specify some of this feedback and how we have implemented it in this iteration of the Forward Work Plan for 2023-2024. The remaining feedback that has not directly impacted on this publication will be addressed in the Performance Report 2022/2023, which is scheduled to be published in December 2023.

Written feedback was provided on three occasions:

- Stakeholder Submissions⁷ requested by the Utility Regulator on the Forward Work Plan 2022 – 2023 published in November 2022
- The EPF (Evaluative Performance Framework) Panel Report⁸ which was published on the Utility Regulator's website on 9 February 2023, and
- The Utility Regulator's decision⁹ on the SONI Forward Work Plan 2022 – 2023 published on their website on 9 February 2023

Stakeholder Submissions to the 2022-2023 Forward Work Plan and SONI's response

Cost and Resource Information

Both the UR and the independent panel have raised points around the potential inclusion of cost and resourcing information which they consider would assist the audience in understanding the scale/importance of a project.

SONI Response

SONI understands the rationale provided by both the UR and the Panel therefore as a result of this feedback we have incorporated a scale for the project costs. This aims to provide additional information as to which projects are on a larger scale than others and aid the audience in considering each projects merit.

Offshore

Renewable NI advised “We note that Role 4 would also be responsible for connections related activities, including offshore. However, there are no deliverables or actions relating to offshore included in the overview or Appendix 4.”

SONI Response

SONI acknowledges Renewable NI's point and agrees that Offshore will play an important role in facilitating the achievement of 80% electricity from renewable sources and has been captured in Role 2 under our activities supporting the energy strategy.

⁷ [SONI's Forward Work Plan - consultation responses | Utility Regulator \(uregni.gov.uk\)](#)

⁸ [EPF Panel Report | Utility Regulator \(uregni.gov.uk\)](#)

⁹ [Letter to SONI UR Decision FWP 2022-23 | Utility Regulator \(uregni.gov.uk\)](#)

TESNI

We feel it is also important that an update of the scenario modelling for the Northern Ireland system (TES) is carried out imminently to support this along with the work on FWP23-14 Supporting the NI Energy Strategy.

SONI Response

SONI welcomes NIE Networks views across these areas in Role 2. We concur that this modelling through the Tomorrows Energy Scenarios for Northern Ireland is an important aspect and as such is included in Role 2 Independent Expert for 2023 - 2024.

Planned Engagement over 2023 - 2024.

We will set out further details of our planned engagements in our Stakeholder Management Strategy, however we can confirm the following strategic engagements for 2023-24:

- The continued delivery of the **Shaping Our Electricity Future Advisory Council** – a key advisory body which steers our delivery of the Shaping Our Electricity Roadmap.
- **Shaping Our Electricity Future** strategic roundtable series, including an industry event with Renewables NI.
- Our renewed partnership with the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce to deliver the **Northern Ireland Energy Forum**. This forum brings together key industry stakeholders with public policymakers in thought leadership.
- Extensive **community and landowner engagement** strategies to support the following SONI infrastructure projects:
 - Energising Belfast – July 2024
 - Armagh – October 2023
 - East Tyrone - September 2024
 - Drumnakelly - Tamnamore Restrung – August 2024
- A programme of deliberative **participatory research** with local communities to inform revisions to SONI's public engagement strategy.
- **Key partnerships** with the following initiatives:
 - Renewables NI Smart Energy Conference
 - Institute of Directors Northern Ireland Women in Leadership Conference
 - Hosting Retail NI Annual General Meeting
 - Londonderry Chamber of Commerce North West Energy Conference
 - Continued participation in CBI Northern Ireland's Energy Working Group.
- A new programme of work to deliver **grassroots engagement in local communities** in relation to SONI's role and the energy transition to coincide with SONI infrastructure project.
- A strategic engagement programme for the new **SONI Board**.
- A **partnership with the Institute of Directors** to develop skills policy in Northern Ireland to ensure the energy industry has the skills based to deliver on our energy strategy targets.
- Continuation of a strategic **bi-lateral programme of engagement** for the SONI Senior Management Team to include key partners such as: NIE Networks, the Department for the Economy, the Utility Regulator, Trade NI, the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, the NI Business Alliance, the Ulster Farmers Union and Renewables NI.
- An extensive engagement programme to develop, inform and shape SONI's forthcoming **Price Control** submission.

Planned Engagement over 2023 - 2024.

We will set out further details of our planned engagements in our Stakeholder Management Strategy, however we can confirm the following strategic engagements for 2023-24:

